HORSE OF Karbala

MUSLIM DEVOTIONAL LIFE IN INDIA



DAVID PINAULT

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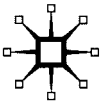
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David Pinault

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For Jody
with love

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Between 1989 and 1999 I made seven research trips to South Asia. With the exception of a side trip to Pakistan to see Sufi shrines in Lahore and an excursion to Sri Lanka to visit Buddhist pilgrimage centers, I focused on India and its Shia Muslim minority population. In each setting within India I examined religious rituals honoring the memory of the Imam Husain, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, who was martyred in battle in the seventh century A.D., at a place in the Iraqi desert called Karbala. Husain died in the month of Muharram (the first month in the Islamic calendar). Annually Shia Muslims throughout the world set aside this month to mourn Husain and the other Karbala martyrs who died with him.

In my travels I gave particular attention to three locales in the subcontinent. The first was Hyderabad, in south-central India, where Shia liturgical practices (notably with regard to the veneration of *alams*, copies of the battle-standards carried at Karbala) show influence from Hinduism. My time there gave me the opportunity to study Shia-Hindu interactions in a ritual setting. It was in Hyderabad that I first learned about flagellation as artform and about poetry as a means to personal salvation in the afterlife.

My second worksite was Darjeeling, in the tea-country district of West Bengal's Himalayan foothills. Here Muharram liturgies are arranged by Sunni rather than Shia Muslims. Darjeeling's Muharram is marked by stick-play, joyous drumming, competition-minded processions: carnival rather than mourning.

A few years ago I shifted my focus to a third region: Ladakh, the northeast quadrant of Jammu and Kashmir state, a mountainous frontier realm sharing a border with Pakistan and Tibet. The population includes Buddhists, Sunnis, and Shias. The Indian military presence in Ladakh (which has increased in recent decades because of intermittent conflicts with China and Pakistan) has diversified the region's religious profile further, through the establishment of Hindu and Sikh shrines for the benefit of soldiers garrisoned in Ladakh. While in Ladakh I studied the local Zuljenah processions, in which a horse representing Husain's battle stallion is caparisoned and led riderless through the streets of towns such as Leh, the district capital. In Leh's Zuljenah procession the "Horse of Karbala" has its mane streaked with red paint and its flanks smeared red to recall the

battlefield wounds of both the animal and its rider. The stallion's appearance triggers outbursts of grief, from weeping to self-scourging, among the crowds on the street. Because the Horse of Karbala procession is public and takes place in Leh's main bazaar, where various populations mingle, this ritual gave me the chance to study the relations of Shia and Sunni Muslims with the region's Buddhist communities.

In this book I give attention to three topics in particular. The first addresses the ways in which Muslim communities today make use of, and modify, the Shia religious tradition from the past. As part of this inquiry I study motifs from the classical textual tradition and note how these are deployed in vernacular poetry and present-day devotional practice. To make this material as accessible as possible, I translate into English the various works that I used from sources in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu.

The second topic involves what I see as points of convergence between Islamic and Christian religious sensibility, more specifically with regard to Shia Muslim and Roman Catholic ritual life. I include this topic not only to make Shia liturgy more approachable for at least some readers of non-Muslim backgrounds, but also to suggest ways in which members of the Islamic and Christian traditions might learn from each other. At various points in this book, but especially in the last chapter, I argue that Islam and Christianity, which share with Judaism a common Abrahamic heritage, have the possibility of collaborative spiritual efforts in the twenty-first century.

Finally, in this book I try to convey something of what it was like for me as an American to do research with Shia communities in India. The personal dimension of my experience was worth recording, I decided, not only because it gives me the chance to tell some good stories, but also because it will draw the reader's attention to my necessarily limited perspective as a foreigner and an outsider. To make sense of what I saw in India, I drew on not only my professional training as an Arabist and textual scholar but also my personal background as a Roman Catholic.

In the end, it is the personal aspect, the opportunity for friendship in settings where one as a stranger has to trust in one's hosts for support, that makes fieldwork something pleasant to remember. I am fortunate in that I was welcomed with kindness and acts of generosity everywhere I went in India. In Hyderabad, I was offered hospitality by Mir Sabir Ali Zawar, founder and secretary of the Anjuman-e Ma'sumeen, and Hassan Abbas Rizvi, poet-chanter of the Association of the Moths of Husain. Seyyed Abbas Ali of the Imam-e Zamana Mission offered me an interview that helped lead to my first encounters with the lamentation guilds of Hyderabad. And I recall with affection the late Ansar Hyder Abedi, who acted as

liaison in arranging meetings with Shia community leaders and who in 1991 invited me to serve as a paramedic in his first-aid station at the city's chief flagellation shrine.

In Darjeeling, I received help from a number of individuals: Muhammad Maqbool Butt Badami and his brother Abdul Rashid, of the Anjuman-e Islamia; the officers of the Saddar Bazaar Muharram Committee and the Doctor Zakir Husain Busti Committee, especially Iltimas Fazli; Habeeb Ullah and Ramzan Butt, of the Indian Tibetan Muslim Welfare Association of Darjeeling; Altaf Fazli, of Jolly Arts Emporium; S. Ahmad Baba, IAS, District Magistrate, West Bengal, who furnished insights on the politics of the region; and Indira Gongba, proprietor of Trek-Mate Travel, who offered me encouragement and many cups of tea at Glenary's on the Mall.

My trips to Ladakh were made easier through the help of many persons: the members of the Anjuman-e Imamia and the Imamia Youth Federation Leh, especially Ghulam Haider Stalampa, Shaikh Mirza Husain, and Akbar Ali; the members of the Anjuman-e Mu'in-e Islam, especially Muhammad Shafi Vakil; Nasir Muhammad, proprietor of Fantasy Travel; Fidai Husain, proprietor of the Yak Tail Hotel; Tashi Rabgias of the Ladakh Ecological Development Group; Shaikh Ghulam Hadi of the Phyang Matam-Serai; Shaikh Muhammad Ali Zubdavi of Thikse village; and in Chushot, Seyyed Naqi Shah, principal of the Imamia Mission School. In Kargil, Shaikh Anwar Husain Sharaf al-Din, of the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust, guided me through the fatwas of the Iranian clerical hierarchy. V. K. Singh, IAS, Senior Superintendent of Police, Leh, provided me a memorable dinner in the barracks behind the main bazaar. And members of the International Association for Ladakh Studies offered information, suggestions, and practical help at numerous points: especially Martijn van Beek, Nicola Grist, Mick Khoo, and Abd al-Ghani Shaikh.

Closer to home, I received encouragement and support from many friends and mentors, especially Wilma Heston and William Hanaway of the University of Pennsylvania, and Michael Peletz of Colgate University. Mary Hegland, the author of groundbreaking and insightful studies on Shia women's rituals in Pakistan, has been an inspiration and a generous source of ideas. My thanks to them all. I am also grateful to Phil Erskine of Information Technology Services at Santa Clara University, who handled last-minute difficulties involving formatting and other issues of computer recalcitrance.

Since 1990 I have taught courses on the Shia tradition in several settings, at Colgate University (in upstate New York), the University of Pennsylvania (in Philadelphia), Loyola University (in Chicago), and Santa

Clara University (in California). I learned more about Shia Islam each time that I taught the subject, thanks in large part to my students, who offered insightful comments and challenging discussions in the classroom. I acknowledge with gratitude their contribution. In particular I thank my student Huda Al-Marashi from Santa Clara University, who generously arranged for me to give a presentation in December 1997 to the Shia congregation at the As-Sadiq Foundation and the City of Knowledge School in Pomona, California.

Portions of several chapters appeared in preliminary form in various publications. Part of chapter two was published in *The Muslim World* 87 (1997), 235-57. Part of chapter seven was originally published in Martijn van Beek, Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen, and Poul Pedersen, eds., *Ladakh: Culture, History and Development Between Himalaya and Karakoram (Recent Research on Ladakh, 8)*, Aarhus, Oxford, Oakville, CT: Aarhus University Press and New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1999; reprinted by permission of Aarhus University Press. Part of chapter eight was published in the journal *History of Religions* 38 (1999), 285-305; copyright 1999 by The University of Chicago, all rights reserved. And part of chapter nine first appeared in *Ladakh Studies* 12 (1999), 21-30. I thank all of these publishers for their permission to make use of this material.

Numerous sources funded my repeated trips to India. I acknowledge the generous support of the American Philosophical Society, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the American Academy of Religion, as well as the Internal Grants program at Loyola University, Chicago. In particular I thank Santa Clara University's College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Religious Studies for the ongoing support they have given me in the form of both encouragement and grants for travel and research.

My biggest thanks, however, are reserved for my wife, Jody Rubin Pinault, who accompanied me on two trips to India and who saw me through all the difficult patches in the making of this book. Some men are lucky in their partners. I know I am.

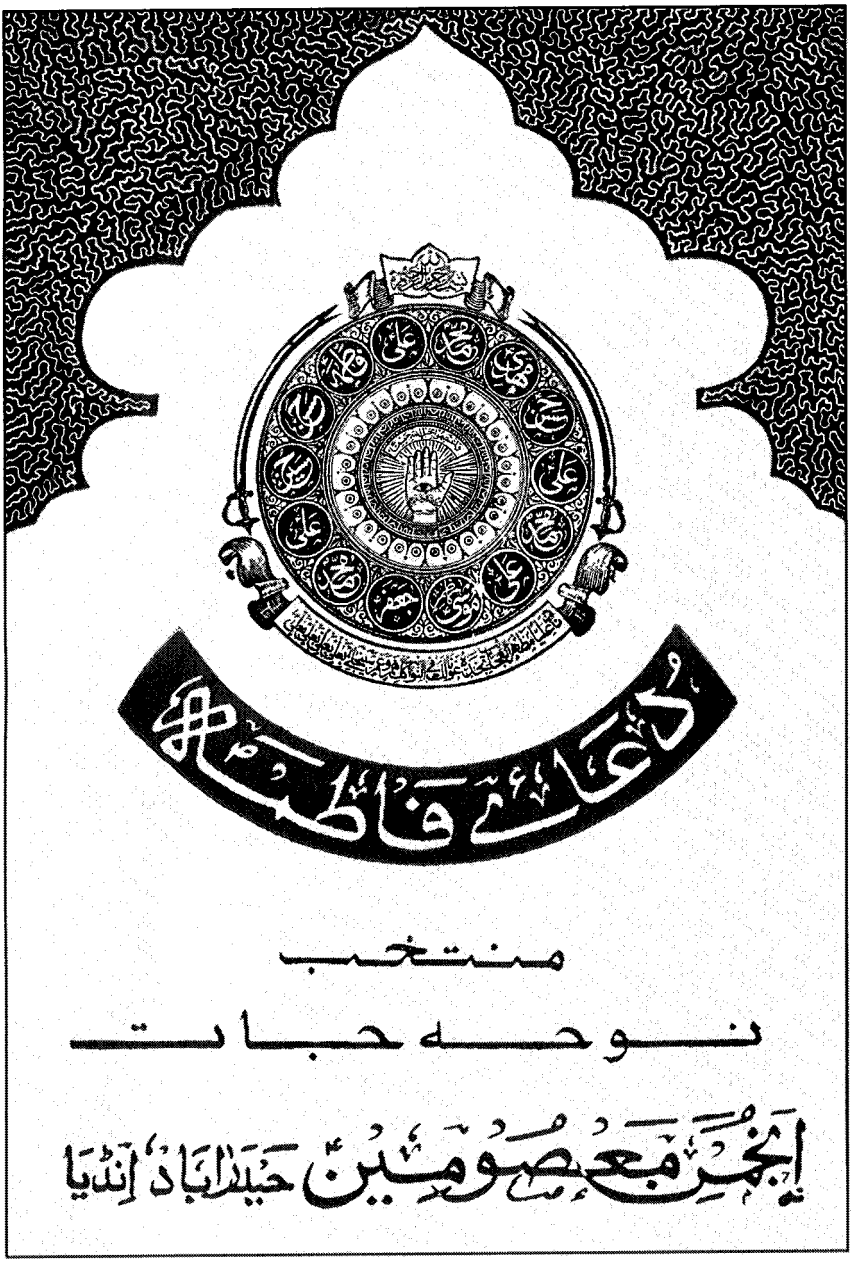
Santa Clara
August 2000

Illustrations

NB: All photographs are by the author.

1. Cover of the poetry chapbook of the Anjuman-e Ma'sumeen (The Association of the Immaculate Ones)
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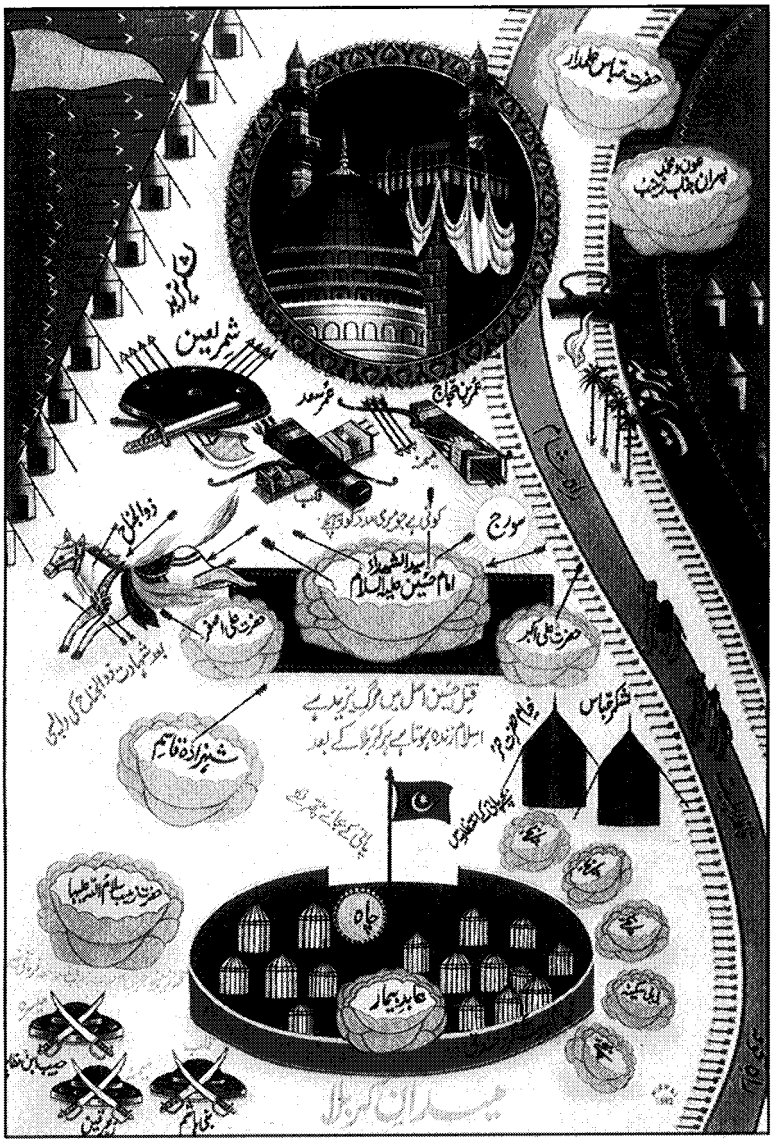
1. Cover of the poetry chapbook of the Anjuman-e Ma'sumeen (The Association of the Immaculate Ones), purchased in Hyderabad, India, 1989. Within the medallion is a talismanic *panje* (protective hand) surrounded by the names of the "Fourteen Immaculate Ones": the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, and the twelve Imams.



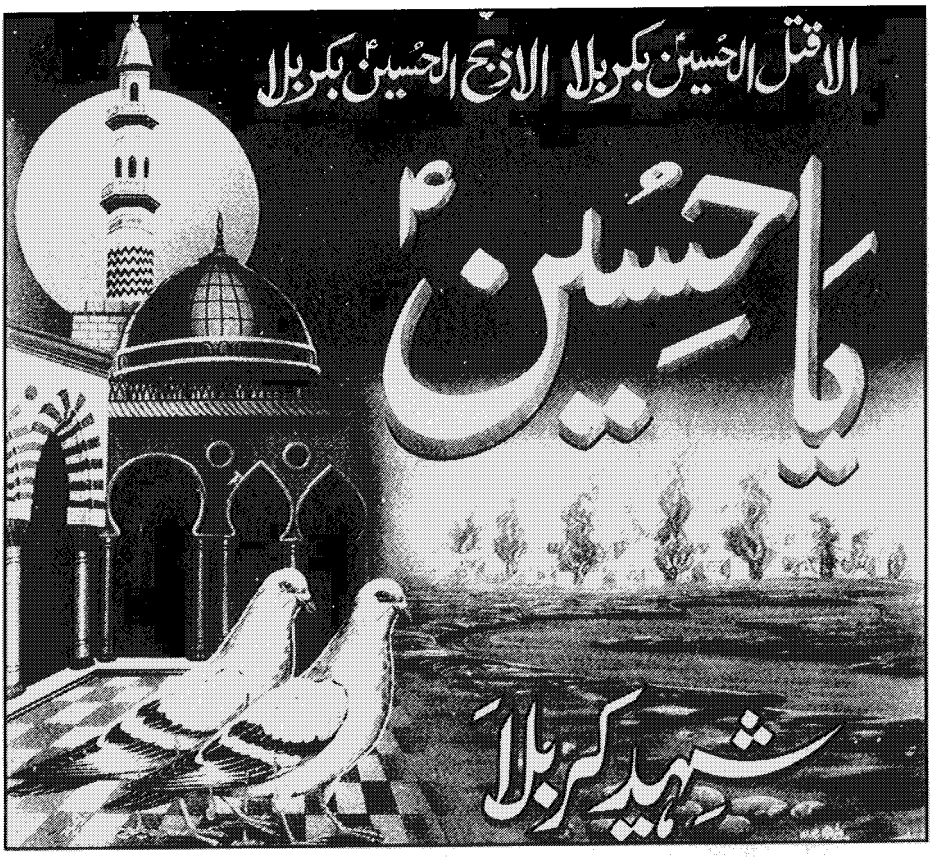
2. Cover of the poetry chapbook of the Parwaneh-ye Shabbir (The Moths of Husain). Illustration shows moths circling a candle flame. Purchased in Hyderabad, 1989.



3. Chapbook cover of a collection of Shia lamentation verses by the poet Ali Javid Maqsud. Purchased in Hyderabad, 1989.



4. Shia poster art: map of Karbala. On the left, Husain's riderless horse; on the right, the Euphrates River and the water flask of Abbas. Note the arrow-pierced roses symbolizing Husain and the other Karbala martyrs. Purchased in Delhi, 1991.



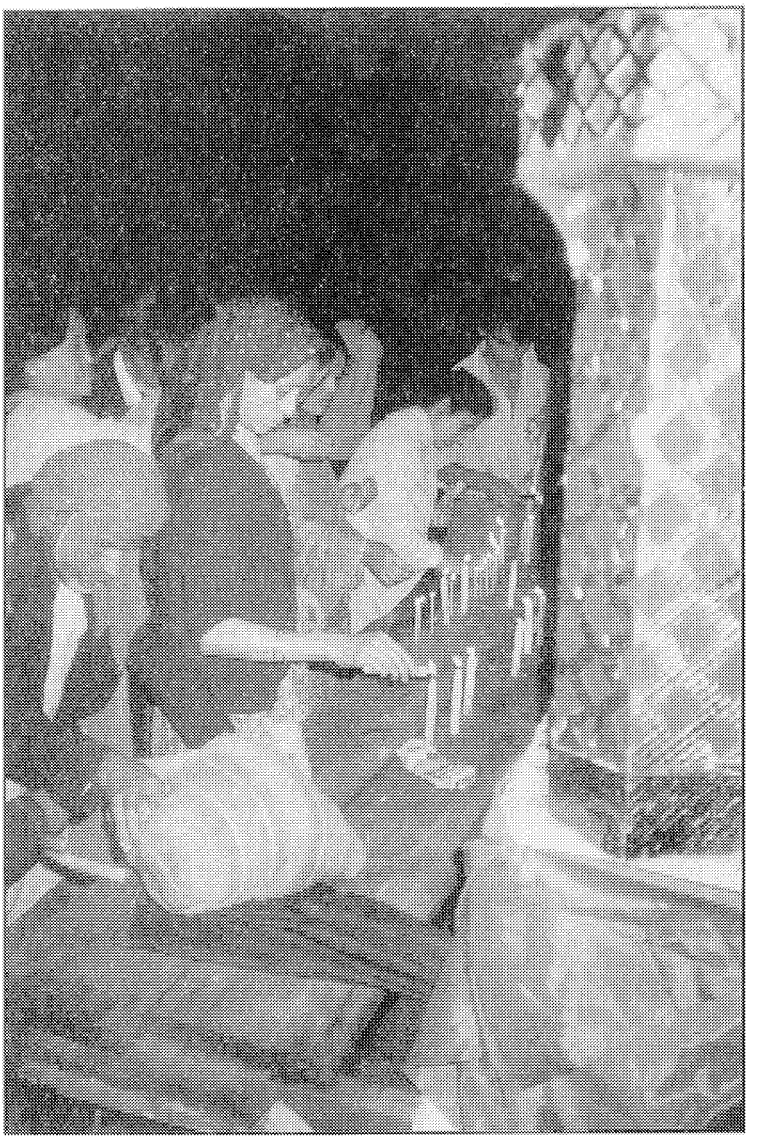
5. Shia poster art: a legend of Karbala. On the right, the martyrs' tents in flames. On the left, two doves, which are said to have dipped their wings in Husain's blood. Thereafter they flew over the city of Medinah. The blood dripping from their wings announced the Imam's death. Purchased in Delhi, 1989.



6. Shia poster art: the Horse of Karbala. Zuljenah, the Imam Husain's white stallion, is shown arrow-pierced on the battlefield. The text reads, "Hail, Husain, Martyr of Karbala." In the upper right, in both Arabic and Urdu, is a *hadith* or saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "Husain proceeds from me, and I proceed from Husain." Purchased in Delhi, 1989.



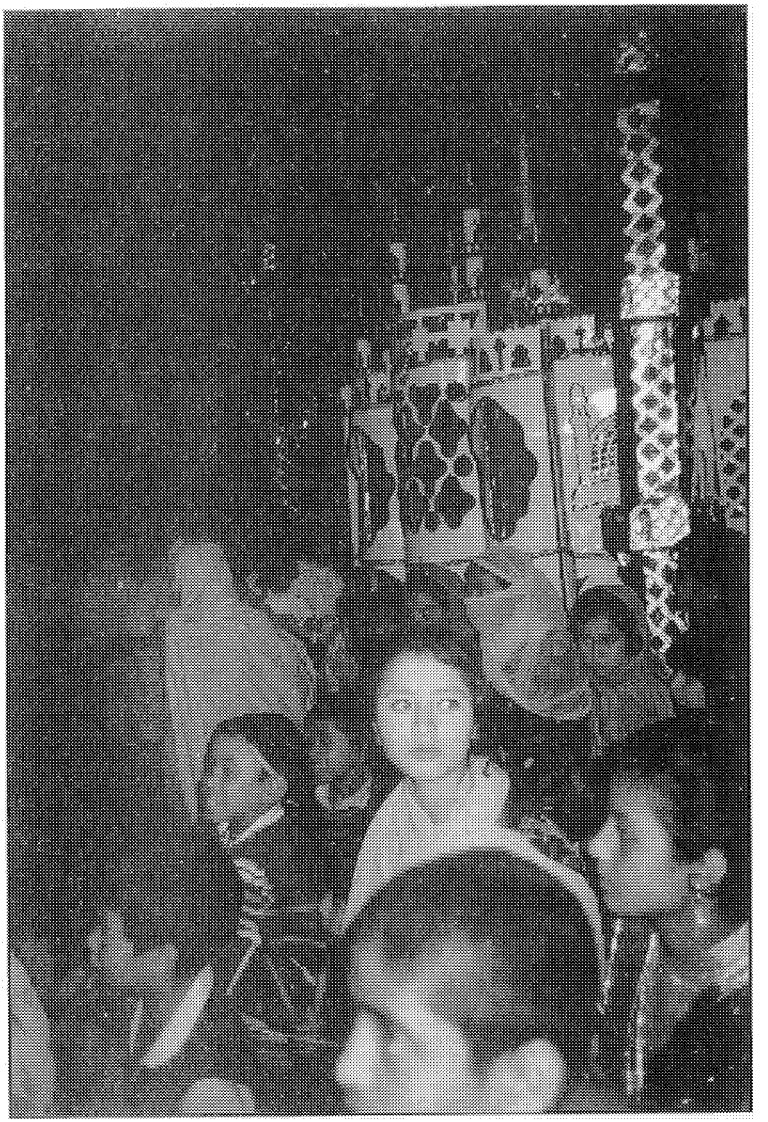
7. Shia poster art: the Horse of Karbala. The text in the upper right corner reads, "Zuljenah, the Winged One, of Lord Imam Husain." Note the mountains and domed pavilions in background. Purchased in Delhi, 1991.



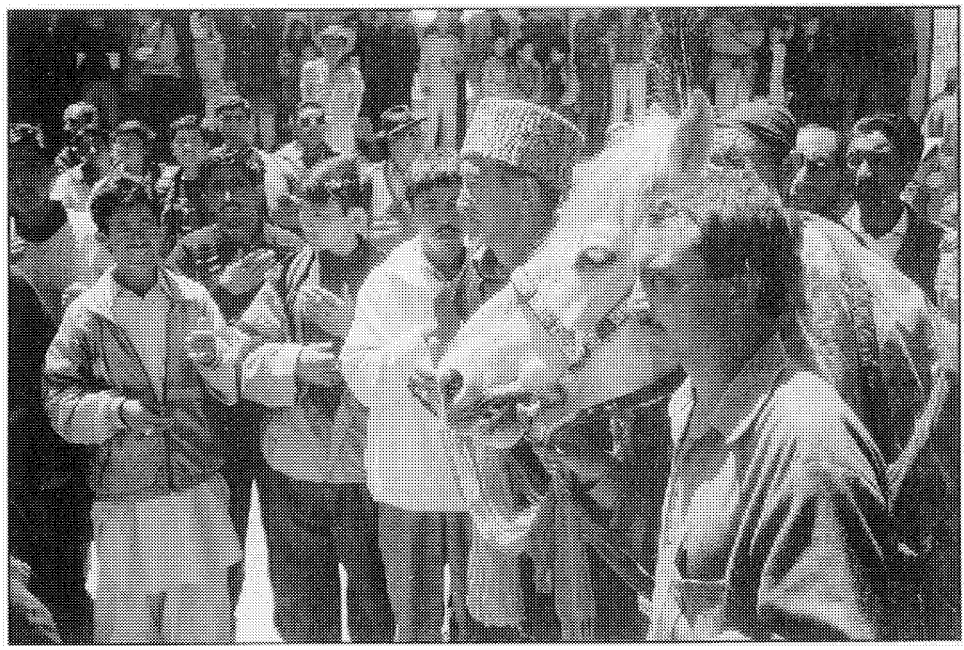
8. Lighting of candles before *tazia*. Darjeeling, Muharram 1995.



9. Drummers awaiting start of *tazia* procession. *Tazias* are representations of the tombs of the martyred Imams. Darjeeling, Muharram 1995.



10. Girls carrying *tazia* in nighttime procession. Darjeeling, Muharram 1995.



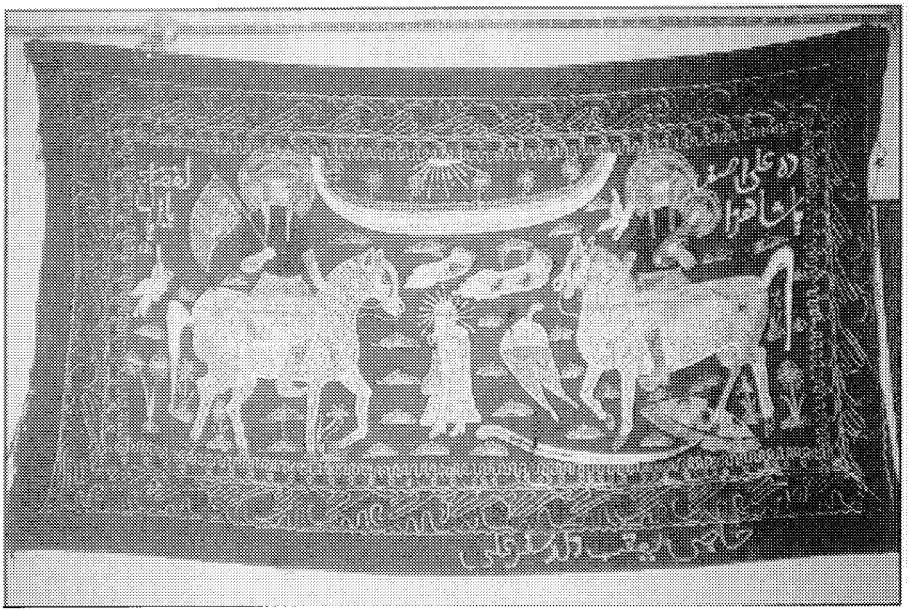
11. Zuljenah, the Horse of Karbala, being led through the streets of Leh township, Ladakh, in a Muharram procession. Day of Ashura, 1996.



12. Mourners striking themselves in lamentation during the Horse of Karbala procession. Leh township, Ladakh, 1996.



13. Horse of Karbala procession. Note peacock feathers adorning Zuljenah, as well as tethered doves, Qur'an atop saddle, and turban stained red to represent Husain's blood. Leh township, Ladakh, Day of Ashura, 1996.



14. Votive wall-hanging. Top center, the Euphrates River and the desert sun of Karbala, flanked by two figures on horseback. To the right, Husain holding his infant son Ali Asghar; to the left, Husain's bodyguard and half-brother Abbas. The text at the bottom identifies the donor as "the pilgrim Ya'qub Walad Safar Ali." Photographed at the Shia *matam-serai* (lamentation shrine) of Phyang village, Leh district, Ladakh, May 1996.



15. Votive wall-hanging. On the right, the arrow-pierced Horse of Karbala; to the left, the severed arm of Abbas. The text within the circlet of flowers reads, "Hail, Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas." In the upper right corner is a Persian text: "The afternoon of Ashura at Karbala." Within the cartouche is the donor's name: "The pilgrim Akhun Mirza Mehdi, of Chushot." Beneath this is stitched the date 13-7-97. Displayed at the *matam-serai* of Chushot Yoghma, Leh district, Ladakh, on the "Day of the Lion," August 8, 1999.



16. Votive wall-hanging. On the right, Zuljenah, the Horse of Karbala; on the left, the severed arm of Abbas and the water flask he carried in his attempt to bring water from the Euphrates to the Imam Husain's children. In the center, above the chainmail headdress, is the phrase, "Hail, Abu al-Fadl [al-Abbas]." The donor, Azima Bano, is the president of the Women's Welfare Society of Chushot Yoghma. Displayed at Chushot Yoghma's *matam-erai* on the "Day of the Lion," August 8, 1999.

ONE

Initiation: Hyderabad, 1989

"How do you feel about blood?" Akhtar glanced at me tentatively as he asked the question, then looked away. Nervous, he seemed.

"What do you mean, how do I feel about blood?" Until now I'd been fine with the prospect of our expedition. Nervousness, however, is contagious. Now he was getting me worried.

"What I mean is, you don't have to go tomorrow. Not if you don't want to. There'll be a lot of blood." He stared at me, looked away again. "Besides, the place will be very crowded. Very hot." The place to which he referred was the Hazrat Abbas ka Dargah, a Shia shrine in Hyderabad's Old City neighborhood. The shrine was consecrated to Abbas, one of the most revered of the Karbala martyrs.

"Very hot," he insisted. "Not much room to breathe."

He enlarged on the topic. Hot, a bit like the battle site of Karbala, a fiery desert furnace in Iraq. "'The place of the great thirst,'" he quoted, citing a verse of lamentation poetry. (He was fond of reciting poetry.)

At Karbala, I knew, thirteen centuries ago, Hazrat Abbas had been killed trying to bring water to his brother's thirsting children. Killed gruesomely: limbs hacked off, his corpse dishonored. And tomorrow morning, the morning of Ashura, the high point of the Shia lamentation season, Hyderabad's shrine to Abbas would become the city's chief site for *zanjiri-matam*: self-flagellation with razors and chains.

How did I feel about blood, Akhtar had asked. Hard to say: I had never encountered anything quite like this before. Heat. Blood. Place of the great thirst. How did I feel? A bit uneasy, for starters.

Akhtar was saying something. "What I mean is"—round and round he turned in his hand a set of sandalwood prayer beads (he'd given up cigarettes for the season and needed something for his hands)—"what I

mean is, some years when I go I don't have a good reaction seeing all the blood." He went on to explain: the sight made him sick, made him feel faint.

"And I've told you already, Doctor David"—despite my pleas for informality, he enjoyed the sound of my academic title too much to relinquish the professorial invocation—"I don't think it's strictly necessary, all this business of people going about cutting themselves always." Another tug at the prayer beads. His lips pursed: disapproval. "Nevertheless, I'd be happy to help you, of course." A long sigh: "I just don't want you to feel sick."

I didn't want to feel sick, either. In fact, my stomach had been bothering me off and on for days. Cramps, diarrhea, queasiness. Just the thought of the next day made me unsteady. Still: it had taken me weeks to locate the site, secure an invitation, arrange the escort. Weak-kneed to give up now.

"I'm perfectly fine," I lied. Looking forward to it, I elaborated: too much energy invested in the project to drop the possibility of seeing the ritual for myself. Acquaintances would be there, people eager to have me as their guest. Et cetera. I was just fine.

That night I didn't sleep well, worrying if I'd be alright at the shrine.

This was 1989, my first Muharram season in India. How had I—for better or worse—gotten into the situation of bracing myself to witness close-up a flagellation ritual?

It began with a Fulbright grant I'd received to do Arabic manuscript research at the Salar Jung Museum and other archives in Hyderabad. Some two years had passed between my initial application for the grant and my departure for India. During this time I read everything I could find on the city of Hyderabad. I learned that for centuries it had been the seat of a Shia dynasty that provided state sponsorship for the annual Muharram rituals in honor of the Karbala martyrs. Even today, I read, Hyderabad remained one of the best places in the subcontinent to witness Shia liturgies.

But what particularly caught my interest in this preparatory reading was a brief reference in an article entitled "Muharram in Hyderabad." The article appeared in an Indian publication called *Al-Basheer: The Bulletin of the Christian Institute of Islamic Studies*. The author, the Reverend D. T. Lindell, an educator and missionary once stationed in Hyderabad, remarked that during the Muharram season "specialized groups of young men take turns in violent and rhythmic beating of breasts, sometimes cutting themselves until they are bathed in blood. The profound sorrow of these events is a moving experience for anyone who witnesses them."[1]

This caught my interest. In my readings I could find very little else about these "specialized groups of young men," but I included the reference

in my notes as a point to investigate as a diversion if time permitted once I reached India.

When I first applied for the grant I was teaching Arabic as a temporary adjunct lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania. Before I left for Hyderabad, however, I was hired by Colgate University's Philosophy and Religion Department for a long-term appointment in Islamic Studies. The new position meant that I'd be required to develop specialized undergraduate courses in the area of Muslim faith and practice. In my job interview I was asked what courses I'd like to create in addition to the usual Introduction to Islam. I thought of my upcoming trip to Hyderabad and said, "How about Shiism and Shia ritual?"

This decision determined the real thrust of my work that first summer in India. Dutifully I trudged from archive to archive, examining Arabic manuscripts in accordance with the original terms of my grant. But wherever I went I asked about Hyderabad's Shia community in general and its "specialized groups of young men" in particular, the ones described by the Reverend Lindell as cutting themselves as part of the Muharram ritual.

The initial response to my questions was not at all helpful. The individuals I first approached were more or less my opposite numbers, that is, they were all university-educated and affiliated with institutions of learning. They tended to be either Hindu or Sunni Muslim, little inclined to discuss Hyderabad's Shia population. I did learn that many of the local Shias lived in poverty, most of them crowded together in housing among the half-ruined villas and palaces of Hyderabad's Old City neighborhoods. When I focused my questions and asked specifically about "young men's groups" who cut themselves during Muharram, the archivists and professors at first said flatly that they had no idea what I was talking about. No such groups, they said, existed in their city. Not nowadays.

I persisted, made a pest of myself. One person I saw almost daily was a clerk in the manuscript room of the Salar Jung Museum. I'll call him Abd al-Salim. Over tea one morning I brought the topic round yet again to Shia rituals and the local Shia men's groups. Did he know of any such groups in Hyderabad?

Exasperated, Abd al-Salim set down his teacup and said that yes, such groups existed, but they were not worth the time and attention of an educated person like myself.

Why not, I asked. Because, he said with evident irritation, these groups were uneducated. They were dirty. They knew nothing about Islam and so would be bad people from whom to learn about the religion. End of discussion.

This dismissal only sharpened my sense that I was on to something interesting. But my first solid bit of data about the Shia men's groups came a week or so later, from Haleem, a young research assistant I'd hired to help me get around the city and locate manuscript archives. In response to my indelicate question one day as to his religious affiliation, Haleem said simply, "Muslim."

"Sunni or Shia?"

"Muslim. Just Muslim. And you?"

"Christian. Roman Catholic."

"Ah." He looked pleased. "You divide up your religion with words like Catholic. Catholic, Protestant, all that. But I refuse to do that to my religion." He explained that Islam is one, just as God is one. Islam is simple: no denominations.

Okay, I said to myself, so I'm a bit of a blockhead. But the blockhead persisted. "What about the Shias?"

The Shias, he explained patiently, were not really Muslim at all. They were guilty of *bid'ah* (introducing heretical innovations): acceptance of idolatry, the concept of intercession, and so on.

As he talked I noted silently that while he steadfastly refused to use the labels Sunni and Shia, he employed again and again another pair of distinctions: *mu'min* and *kafir*, believer and unbeliever. (Whether these latter designations are more helpful or more destructive than the former is a point to which I return later.)

But despite his own very open anti-Shia sentiments, Haleem proved more informative than the clerks at the Salar Jung. "Oh, yes," he said right away when I asked, "I've heard of these Shia groups that beat themselves." He even knew the names of two of them: the Anjuman-e Ma'sumeen (the Association of the Immaculate Ones) and the Parwaneh-ye Shabbir (the Moths of Husain). He added at once that he knew nothing about these associations beyond the names.

Even as I was writing these names in my notebook, however, Haleem added carelessly, "Of course these groups are not worth your time." When I asked why, I was given the same reasons I'd heard elsewhere: the members of these groups were supposedly ignorant and uneducated, bad sources to approach to learn about Islam. Haleem did not hesitate to make such assertions despite the fact that he'd just admitted knowing next to nothing about the groups.

Still, I had names. And my first real breakthrough came only a few days after this chat, in a bookstore called A. A. Husain, on a crowded downtown street near the general post office. While browsing the shelves I

made the acquaintance of the owner's son, Shawkat Husain, who invited me to tea in his office at the rear of the store. Over his desk was mounted a small plaque bearing a kind of coat of arms: a pair of crossed axes, each inscribed in Arabic with the name of Ali, the first Shia Imam.

I recognized the insignia: it was that of a Sufi mystical order, the Nimatullahi Tariqah. When I told him I knew of this Sufi order, Shawkat was pleased but surprised. He stated that yes, he was a member of the order and that there was a branch of the Nimatullahi Tariqah here in the city.

As we sat with our tea I could sense that Shawkat was sizing me up. To establish my credentials I pointed to the crossed axes. "The blades of *fana'*," I said. The term refers to the extinction of the mystic's separate selfhood in the direct experience of the divine light.

Shawkat smiled.

"And this reminds me," I continued, "of the verses of a Persian poem:

Koshtagan-e khanjar-e taslim-ra
Har zaman az ghayb jan-e digar ast."[2]

I followed this up with a translation:

"For those killed with the dagger
of 'submission to God,'
at every instant there comes to them
fresh life from the Hidden Realm."

This was showing off on my part, but excusable, perhaps: Shawkat's smile broadened. For the next hour we talked, of his bookstore and life in Hyderabad, of my Arabic language studies in Egypt years earlier and my first encounters there with Sufi brotherhoods, of his membership in the Nimatullahi order and his Friday-morning visits to the tomb of Mir Mahmoud Deccani, a local saint revered by the Nimatullahis.

Not being the most patient of interrogators, I soon brought the conversation around to the topic on my mind. Had he ever heard, I asked, of associations known as the Ma'sumeen or the Moths of Husain?

Yes he had. He himself couldn't tell me much, he apologized, but he knew someone who could: Seyyed Abbas Ali, director of a Shia charitable association called the Imam-e Zamana Mission. Located some distance away, in a neighborhood named Himayatnagar, he explained, and when he saw that I was on fire to follow up the tip at once, he good-naturedly helped me find a rickshaw for the dash across town.

Seyyed Abbas Ali was a prominent businessman, it turned out, with ties to the Shia community. He presided over a number of enterprises headquartered in a single building: an import-export firm, a moving company, a print shop. As part of his attempt to help his co-religionists, Seyyed Abbas said, he made a point of offering employment whenever possible to Shias who needed jobs.

Seyyed Abbas was generous enough to meet with me several times. The first visit, from my perspective, was not quite what I'd come for. I wanted the nitty-gritty. Shiism in practice, Shia ritual observances here in Hyderabad, self-mortification, Ma'sumeen, the Moths of Husain. He for his part wanted to review the basics. Was I familiar with the Five Pillars of Islam, he offered expansively.

Yes I was. This didn't stop him from reviewing the Pillars anyway. Fasting and its significance. Daily prayer and its significance. The testimony of faith. Pilgrimage to Mecca. Almsgiving. I smiled, nodded, reminded myself of the Egyptian proverb that states *al-Sabr gameel*: Patience is a beautiful thing.

In our second conversation the topic moved nearer my goal. Seyyed Abbas talked about the practice of *matam*. This term can refer in general to acts of lamentation for the deceased, but in Shia Islam *matam* denotes specifically gestures of ritual mourning in honor of the Karbala martyrs. *Matam* can range from simple repetitive chest-beating to self-flagellation with razors, chains, and knives. Seyyed Abbas explained that *matam* supplements rather than replaces the obligations associated with the Five Pillars: thus it is *mustahabb*, commendable or meritorious, rather than obligatory.

Most Shias, he said, limit themselves to *hath ka matam*, bare-handed chest-slapping as a form of mourning. But a minority of Shias go further, including some of the members of the *matami guruhan* (the guilds or associations that organize lamentation gatherings): they feel that bare-handed *matam* is not enough, that shedding one's own blood is the best form of lamentation.

This was more like it, I thought. But even as I scribbled notes, Seyyed Abbas looked at his watch and excused himself. He had an appointment. On impulse I asked whether he'd mind if I wandered about the building on my own, introduced myself to the employees? He said not at all.

This led to my best break of the year. On the staircase I could hear from the basement the sound of machinery, men laughing, orders shouted. I followed the sound to what proved to be the "Jet Print Shop." No sooner did I enter and introduce myself than work stopped: the novelty of a foreigner showing up and asking questions made the perfect occasion for a tea break.

In talking to these men—some supervisors, others laborers—I realized that here I'd found a sampling of Shias from various strata of Hyderabadi society, both university-trained and self-educated. Everyone asked for my business card, and there was a lot of exclaiming over my affiliation: Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies. But before I could be quizzed about my knowledge of the Five Pillars, I lobbed a preemptive question: "Has anyone here ever heard," I asked, "of a group called the Moths of Husain?"

Big grins all around. "Have we heard of them?" said one man. "Yes, we have." He turned and shouted toward the back of the shop. "Hassan!"

A bearded man emerged from the back, in his mid- to late-thirties, I judged. "This is Hassan Abbas Rizvi," I was told. Chief poet, came the explanation, and chanter for the Association of the Moths of Husain. And also, as I was later to learn, friendly guide, unfailingly generous host, and an outstanding source of information on the *matami guruhan* of Hyderabad.

I had struck gold.

Two days later Hassan Abbas Rizvi came to my hotel, the Rock Castle, a weathered clustering of Raj-era bungalows. It's not easy to find, set at some distance from the city center, at the top of a boulder-strewn hill reached by a pitted access road that corkscrews up the slope. Tumble-down is a good word to describe the Rock Castle as I remember it: but its verandas offered views out over the city, hawks glided overhead in the heat currents, almost, it seemed, within arm's reach, and the garden was pleasantly overgrown and peaceful. It offered a retreat from the crowds and noise and exhaust fumes of downtown.

"Sorry for the delay." Hassan and his friends had arrived an hour after the time we'd set. They'd promised to take me on an introductory tour of Shia shrines in the Old City. "Some mechanical difficulty." He waved in the direction of their car, a clunky old Ambassador.

They stood on my veranda, the four of them—Hassan Abbas, Akhtar, Muhsin, and Hyder—admiring the hilltop views. In the distance heavy gray clouds massed over the city. A wind blew toward us. Monsoon season.

I started to ask about the chance of rain, but Muhsin was studying the numeral posted above my door as if he'd discovered something significant. And in fact he had. He nudged Hassan.

"Room fourteen. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm." Hassan turned to me. "Do you know the special meaning of the number fourteen?"

"Sure." I hadn't yet given any thought to the numerological implications of my room assignment, but I could guess what I was supposed to say.

"*Chawdeh Ma'sumeen:* the Fourteen Immaculate Ones. The Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, and the twelve Imams."

"Very good." They exchanged glances. "Fourteen. A good sign."

"Happy coincidence," I said.

"*Not* a coincidence," the poet assured me.

"This fellow," announced Muhsin for my benefit, grinning at Hassan, "sees signs everywhere."

Hassan protested that signs were everywhere to be found in the world, backing his assertion with a Qur'anic citation: "Doesn't God say, 'We will show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves'?"

I nodded solemnly, trying to show due seriousness in response to a verse of scripture; but then he clapped his hands and smiled. "Shall we make our way?"

We'd barely left the hotel driveway before the Ambassador stalled. "No problem." Muhsin let out the clutch. "Downhill slope." We coasted in neutral.

Near the bottom the engine caught. "Ahh." We were off.

As we headed into the city I took out my notebook and the list of questions I'd prepared. "Why does your group have the name 'Moths of Husain'?" As honored guest I sat in the back with the poet Hassan.

Carefully he unfolded a printed sheet of paper and handed it to me. Printed thereon was the association's insignia: a glowing candle, its flame surrounded by minuscule winged creatures.

"The moths love the light; we love Imam Husain." He tapped the paper, rubbed his beard, looking thoughtful and serious. Then a smile: "We are all insects. His insects."

After this Hassan was serious once more, and as the car jounced its way downtown, I wrote notes to summarize what he said: that our love for Imam Husain is such that we would do anything to feel close to him, just as moths don't count the cost to reach the flame that draws them. That since Husain suffered at Karbala, we, too, want to suffer with him. That since Husain's sister and other family members wept at his death, we, too, want to weep. He thought of all these things, Hassan told me, whenever he recited his Muharram poems for Shia gatherings. He wanted everyone to feel Husain's sorrow.

"Our Hassan Abbas is a very sensitive poet. When he starts chanting, everyone starts crying." Muhsin grinned into the rearview mirror. "A very sensitive fellow. So sensitive he'll weep at the drop of a hat. But please don't get him started here in the car. We'll all be in tears."

For a second I wasn't sure how to respond, whether the poet might have taken offense. Then Hassan laughed out loud, and so did everyone else

in the car. And this is one of my best memories of Hyderabad: the combination of playfulness and profound religious seriousness among the men I met, to a degree I've never subsequently encountered in Shia communities, whether in India, Chicago, or California.

I had more questions, about chest-beating, bloody *matam*, penitence, intercession, and the forgiveness of sins. But matters mechanical and meteorological intruded. As we headed into Abids Road, with its uproar of buses and freight trucks and darting auto-rickshaws, our car stalled again. And at this moment the monsoon made itself felt. Fat drops of rain spattered the hood, hesitant at first, then quickening to a downpour.

Stalled dead in traffic: humid dirty air, buses pressing round us, a knot of beggars stepping off the curb in our direction, hands outstretched toward a conspicuously immobilized foreigner.

"No problem." Muhsin jumped from the Ambassador, waved away the beggars, began to push the car while reaching in to steer with one hand. Akhtar and Hyder climbed out and helped roll the car forward. I tried to join them.

"No, no." A firm hand pressed me back into the seat.

"Let me push, too. I can't just sit here."

"Please. Be comfortable. You are our guest."

I started to insist, began to climb out on Akhtar's side, but he gave me a look as if all his honor were at stake in shielding me from the rain. "Please, Doctor David."

I leaned forward in the seat. "At least let me steer."

"No, no." Muhsin laughed and brushed my hand from the wheel. "You must save your strength for tonight, for the shrines. Lots of new things to show you."

I subsided, sank back in my seat. Muhsin and Akhtar and Hyder joked and shouted encouragement to each other.

"Hassan," Muhsin called out. "Tell Doctor David about the Old City."

And for the next several minutes I sat beside the poet while his friends sweated like coolies and wheeled us through traffic. He discoursed on the sights I was about to be privileged to see: shrines dedicated to the Lady Fatima, private chapels with chandeliers and interior courtyards and porticos, reliquaries made of gold and hung with jewels. As we came in sight of the Musi River and the Shia neighborhoods on the far side of the Afzal Bridge, he told me anecdotes of the reigning Nizams who had once built the splendid domes and towers now crumbling by the river.

And Hassan Abbas transformed Hyderabad for me. Fitfully, as I looked up from my notes, I began to see the city as he had conjured it

forth: not as a smog-withered disappointment, but as something beckoning, with its old pavilions and its bridge rising before us as a gateway to experiences mysterious, compelling, magical. He spoke, and I remembered a thirteenth-century Arabic biography I had once read describing the "Master of Illumination," the theosopher and mystic Suhrawardi of Aleppo:

> Stories are told of Suhrawardi to the effect that he had mastered the art of visual illusions (*'ilm al-simiya*). He had a repertoire of choice rarities of this art which were witnessed by certain people. For example, the physician Ibrahim ibn Abi al-Fadl ibn Sadaqah told me [i.e., the author] that he had once met Suhrawardi outside the Bab al-Faraj Gate. They were walking towards the Great Square. A group of students were with them. Talk came up of this art [i.e., the science of *simiya*] and its wonders and what is known of it; and all the while he was listening. Suhrawardi walked on a little ways and said: "How beautiful is Damascus and all such locations!" He spoke; we looked, and behold!: suddenly, from the direction of the East, there appeared palaces, towering in height and grouped closely together, gleaming, white-washed, the most beautifully constructed and ornamented palaces imaginable. Therein were large windows; posed in each window were women, the most beautiful there could ever be. And there were the voices of the inhabitants; and trees, their branches interlaced; and great flowing streams.[3]

The rain spattered down. Our Ambassador rolled forward, through monsoon puddles nearly as big as Suhrawardi's "great flowing streams." We wheeled by mud-flecked rickshaws, bicyclists, goats.

Muhsin tried the ignition again. An instant later the engine coughed and everyone jumped back in. The car jounced us over the bridge.

So I was propelled, careening, into the mystery.

T W O

An Introduction to the Shia Tradition in Islam

DEATH AT KARBALA: HUSAIN'S MARTYRDOM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE LIGHT OF SHIA THEOLOGY

In the weeks that followed my first encounter with the Moths of Husain I learned about many aspects of Shia devotionalism, from preachers, dirge-chanters, avid flagellants, and disapproving skeptics. But before I examine Shia ritual practices and the controversies surrounding them, it might be useful at this point to sketch the historical events commemorated every year in Shia ritual: the seventh-century death of the Imam Husain and the sufferings of his family at the battle of Karbala.

Left unsettled at the death of Muhammad in A.D. 632 was the question of succession to leadership of the Islamic community: to whom should power devolve, and how should a ruler's qualifications be determined? One party favored the process of election by a circle of advisors and community leaders; the other espoused the cause of Ali ibn Abi Talib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, who had married the Prophet's daughter Fatima. The latter group referred to themselves as *shi'at 'Ali* ("Alid partisans/supporters of Ali") or simply as *al-shi'a*. They maintained that the Prophet himself, guided by divine inspiration, had designated Ali as his successor. Moreover, Ali's ties by marriage and blood bound him more closely than anyone else to the family of Muhammad.

Despite his qualifications, Ali was blocked repeatedly from power: first the Prophet's companion Abu Bakr became caliph, then Umar, then Uthman. Ali did not contest their election, apparently out of a desire to avoid civil war. Finally, he did obtain the caliphate and ruled for some

five years, only to be murdered in 661. His wife Fatima predeceased him: so devoted was she to her father that she died of grief within a few months of the Prophet's death. During this final period of her life, according to Shia sources, Fatima had been abused by Ali's rivals. Abu Bakr prevented her from inheriting property bequeathed her by the Prophet; and Umar, in a confrontation at Ali's home over the right to the caliphate, suddenly shoved open the door of the house, thereby striking Fatima and breaking several of her ribs.[1]

Upon Ali's death the caliphate passed to Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, governor of Damascus and Syria. Muawiya was a Qurayshi (a member of the Prophet Muhammad's tribe) but also belonged to the wealthy Umayyad clan, notorious for its late conversion to Islam and its obstinate hostility to Muhammad in the early days before the Prophet's final success in Mecca.

The Shias' hopes now focused on Hasan and Husain, the two sons of Ali and Fatima. At stake was a growing Islamic empire that had already conquered much of the Near East, North Africa, and Iran. Muawiya coerced the elder son Hasan into yielding him the caliphate; Hasan was then forced into a pensioned retirement in Medina (where, according to Shia sources, he was subsequently poisoned at the caliph's order). Although he was deprived of the caliphate, Hasan is nevertheless revered today as the second Imam (the first was Ali). In Shiism the term Imam indicates those members of *Ahl-e Bayt* (the Prophet Muhammad's family) who are the true spiritual leaders of the Muslim community, regardless of any political recognition or lack thereof extended by the Muslim world at large.[2]

In the year 680 Muawiya died and was succeeded by his son Yazid. The latter is reviled today as a tyrant who felt no shame at making a public display of his drinking and immoral lifestyle. At Muawiya's death Alid partisans in the Iraqi city of Kufa, long a Shia stronghold, sent messengers to Mecca to Ali's surviving son Husain, urging him to come to Kufa, lead a Shia revolt against Yazid, and claim the caliphate that was rightfully his by virtue of descent from the Prophet. Husain accepted the call and set out from Mecca with only a small band of followers, including his personal bodyguard and the women and children of his household.

But Ali's son never reached Kufa. At Karbala, near the Euphrates River, southwest of what is today Baghdad, he was intercepted and surrounded by forces loyal to Yazid. Meanwhile the Umayyad governor of Kufa had quelled the incipient rebellion there and by intimidation had prevented any Shia attempts to rescue their leader at Karbala. From the second to the tenth day of the month of Muharram the Imam Husain and his followers withstood siege by Yazid's army, which hoped to force the small band to surrender.

Husain chose death instead. Throughout the siege the defenders suffered from hunger and thirst. Anguished by the cries of Husain's children, Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas, half-brother and personal attendant of the Imam, galloped to the Euphrates in an attempt to bring water. He perished in so doing, dying in his brother's arms. Shortly thereafter, on Ashura, the tenth of Muharram, Husain's camp was overrun by the enemy. Husain himself was killed, his household taken captive. The train of prisoners, including Husain's sisters Zaynab and Umm Kulthum, was marched through the desert to Damascus. Here Yazid is said to have gloated over the severed head of his rival, which had been brought from the battlefield for the caliph to dishonor with blows from a cane. Here too, within the very palace of Yazid, Zaynab held the first *majlis* (plural: *majalis*), or lamentation assembly, to mourn for her brother. During this period of imprisonment Husain's four-year-old daughter Sakina died. Finally Yazid released the survivors. They returned to Arabia by way of Karbala, where they halted to lament Husain's death once more.

The ninth-century historian al-Tabari, in his description of the battle, records traditions to the effect that Husain hesitated at one point in his journey to Kufa, when he learned of the opposition awaiting him and the unlikelihood of political success for his proposed uprising. Only at the urging of certain of his followers did Husain proceed.[3] But such views are denied by Shia interpreters of Karbala, who insist that Husain had foreknowledge of his own defeat and violent death and voluntarily chose to embrace martyrdom at Karbala. This martyrdom was necessary in order to awaken Muslims to an awareness of the moral threat to the entire Islamic community constituted by Yazid's tyrannous reign. In the Shia view Husain deliberately brought the women and children of his household with him to Karbala, so as to increase the shock felt by the Islamic community upon learning of their humiliation and captivity and thereby heighten public aversion to Yazid.[4]

But in addition to the Muslim community as a whole, Husain's sacrifice is held by devout Shias to benefit believing individuals. In exchange for the suffering voluntarily undergone by Husain and the Karbala martyrs, God has granted them *shafa'ah* (the power of intercession). This power is also granted to Fatima, who even while in Paradise experienced agonies of grief for Husain and is believed to descend to earth to be spiritually present at every *majlis* held for her son. Husain and Fatima will exercise *shafa'ah* on behalf of anyone who remembers the Karbala martyrs and honors them during the month of Muharram.[5] In a later chapter I will return to the question of intercession and the controversies surrounding this doctrine.

THE SHIA TRADITION IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL OUTLINE

Students of Shiism in the Indian subcontinent must reckon with certain realities. First, the Shias of India exist as a minority within a minority. Muslims constitute approximately 11 percent of India's population; Shias comprise some 10 percent of the Muslim community.[6] Second, Shiism as an Islamic tradition espouses a doctrinal exclusivism that would at first glance seem completely at odds with the larger religious context of South Asia. *Tawhid* (the monotheistic assertion of God's oneness, a belief honored by all Muslims, Sunni and Shia alike) is apparently irreconcilable with the imagistic polytheism associated with Hinduism at the popular level. This factor, taken together with the minority status cited above, might well have condemned Shias to unending religious strife with their non-Muslim neighbors.

Such has not proved to be the case, however, in part because of a third factor characterizing India's religious environment, what anthropologist Clarence Maloney calls the "genius" of the "indigenous classical religions" (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism), namely, "their facility to accommodate a vast range of diverse and contradictory elements."[7] Thus, no matter how ardently a mullah of Lucknow might try to demarcate the confessional boundaries between Shiism and other faiths, Hindus have repeatedly been drawn to Muharram ceremonies in honor of Imam Husain, venerating him as if he were an Indian "god of death," while Shia liturgies in cities such as Hyderabad employ rituals and iconography reflecting influence from indigenous South Asian tradition.[8]

So strong is this syncretizing tendency in the subcontinent that, if we are interested in understanding Indian Shiism as lived experience rather than merely as creedal formulation (and my own work has been driven by the desire to encounter the Shia faith as popular devotion rather than as formal theology), then we should perhaps view it as simply one point along a continuum of South Asian religious practice. This is not to say that doctrine has had no place in Indian Shiism. Rather, the history of Shia Islam in India has been marked at some times by polemics (directed either against Hindus or against Sunni Muslims), at other times by inclusiveness, demonstrating a pragmatic accommodation to the reality of the surrounding Hindu environment.

Recent publications by some Indian Shia authors have made the claim that Shiism's ties with India go back as far as the battle of Karbala itself. Such authors cite traditions to the effect that the Imam Husain expressed the desire to take refuge in India; that his wife Shahrbanu was related by marriage to the Indian king Chandra Gupta; that a band of Indian warriors known as

"Mohyal Brahmins" went to Iraq and helped Mukhtar al-Thaqafi avenge Husain's defeat; and that as early as the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., India served as a refuge for individual Shias persecuted by the caliphs of Damascus and Baghdad.[9]

As a substantial collective presence, however, Shiism in South Asia dates only to the late tenth century, when Ismaili Shia missionaries established political power in Sindh, in the city of Multan (today in Pakistan). Within twenty years, however, Ismaili Multan was conquered by Mahmud of Ghazna.[10]

More lasting was Shia political power in south-central India, in the region known as the Deccan. This area fell under Muslim domination in the fourteenth century with the founding of the Bahmani kingdom by Hasan Gangu. Originally an officer from the northern realm of the Muslim Delhi sultanate, Hasan took advantage of internal weakness in the northern state to consolidate the Deccan conquests initiated by the Delhi sultan Muhammad ibn Tughlaq.

The folklore surrounding Hasan Gangu and the naming of the Bahmani kingdom is important for what it reveals of the cultural forces at work in southern India. In one legend Hasan is described as a man of noble Iranian ancestry but of impoverished circumstance, forced to make his way in the world as best he could. One day he fell asleep outdoors beneath a tree and was seen by a passing priest of the Hindu Brahman caste. The Brahman halted in astonishment at the figure he glimpsed behind the sleeping Hasan: a great cobra, coiled and alert, keeping watch to safeguard the wayfarer. This tableau recalls the iconography of the sleeping Vishnu (a Hindu god revered as sustainer and preserver of the universe), who is depicted as reclining beneath the outspread hood of a watchful cobra. Knowing the snake's action to be a portent, the priest waited until Hasan awoke, then told him what he had witnessed and offered to become the poor man's servant, on the condition that Hasan add the priest's title to his name. Hasan agreed, and when fortune favored him with rule over a kingdom the new sultan conferred on it the name Bahmani (supposedly a corruption of the word Brahman). Another account states that Hasan claimed descent from the ancient Sassanid ruler of Iran, Bahman son of Isfandiyar; for this reason he took the title Bahman ibn Shah and named his kingdom Bahmani.[11]

These stories reflect two of the enduring cultural and religious influences on Hyderabad, the Persian and the Hindu. The Bahmanis recruited courtiers and soldiers from Iran as well as central Asia. The Iranian Nimatullahi Tariqah, a Sufi brotherhood of Shia orientation, sent dervishes to preach in the Deccan (this is the order whose insignia—crossed axes

inscribed with the name of the Imam Ali—I encountered in a Hyderabadi bookshop, as described in the previous chapter). Nimatullah Wali, master of this order, dispatched to one of the Bahmani sultans a gift consisting of an emerald twelve-pointed crown (symbolizing the spiritual lordship of the twelve Shia Imams).[12]

In the early sixteenth century the Bahmani realm disintegrated into independent princedoms, one of which, the Qutb Shahi dynasty of Golconda, founded the city of Hyderabad in 1591. The Qutb Shahis sponsored public Muharram processions and built a number of Shia shrines in Hyderabad. The Shia Safavid government of Iran cultivated good relations with the Qutb Shahis, apparently in an attempt to combine forces against the powerful (and largely Sunni) Moghul kingdom of northern India.

In fact, diplomatic relations between the two Shia states gave the Moghuls an excuse to invade the Deccan. In the seventeenth century the Moghul ruler Aurangzeb complained of the Qutb Shahi sultan as "an oppressor against whom the people were invoking the heavens, a heretic who had perverted all his subjects from the pure Sunni faith, and lastly an ally and financial supporter of the king of Persia. Not to punish such a heretical ruler would be failure of duty on the part of an orthodox Islamic emperor."[13] One of the demands made by Aurangzeb was that henceforth the Qutb Shahis should omit the name of the Iranian shah in all public prayers within their realm. Although Aurangzeb conquered the Qutb Shahi state in 1687, Shia cultural and religious influence has continued to make itself felt in Hyderabad up to the present day. (Parenthetically, it is worth noting here that among the Shias I interviewed in both Hyderabad and Ladakh, Aurangzeb's name was a byword for the whole history of sporadic Sunni persecutions of Shias in the Indian subcontinent—a point to which I return in a later chapter.)

In northern India the record of Shia devotionalism is marked by dramatic reversals. The sixteenth-century Moghul emperor Humayun, in order to recover the throne of Delhi from his rivals, sought help from the Iranian Safavid shah Tahmasp and in the process embraced (or pretended to embrace) Twelver Shiism. The reign of Humayun's son Akbar (reigned 1556-1605) and his immediate successors witnessed an increased presence of immigrants from Iran, among them merchants, poets, and artists.

Akbar's reign was a period of religious tolerance for Shias. The protection enjoyed by Shias at this time reflects the eclectic syncretism of Akbar's court-sponsored *din-i ilahi* (divine religion), with its blending of elements from Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and mystical Islam. Not that Akbar himself particularly favored Shiism; rather, in the ambience created by his "divine religion" and the concept of *sulh-i kull* (universal peace), an

individual's denominational adherence tended to matter less than personal loyalty to the emperor.[14]

This tolerance ended with the rule of Aurangzeb (reigned 1658-1707), who outlawed Shia rituals within the Moghul empire and attacked the Qutb Shahi Deccan realm (as we have seen) in the name of Sunni orthodoxy. Later in the eighteenth century, however, with the decline of centralized Moghul power in Delhi, the Shia-dominated province of Awadh began to acquire political autonomy. Its administrators and aristocracy in large part comprised Iranian émigrés who had come to India and acquired subordinate positions in the Moghul hierarchy. With independence Awadh's Shia aristocracy expressed its newfound power in two ways: through the sponsorship of public Muharram processions in the capital city of Lucknow, and through the employment of Usuli Shia *ulama* (religious scholars) who had been trained in the law schools of Iraq and Iran.[15] Each of these two developments warrants discussion.

Lucknow today enjoys (so to speak) an unenviable reputation as a place of communal confrontation during Muharram; nevertheless it should be emphasized that this Shia religious observance once served the positive role of community bridge-building in Lucknow. As Juan Cole demonstrates in his study of religion and state in Awadh, "Widespread, though not universal, Sunni and Hindu participation made Muharram rites transcommunal."[16] At least such was frequently the case in Lucknow before the advent and dominance of denomination-based communal politics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century India.

The reason for the ecumenical quality of Muharram has to do with the relationship between religion and society in traditional India. During the Moghul era the individual's personal identity was most typically shaped not by exclusivist-minded religious authorities; rather, one's loyalties were directed to a nearby patron, a landowner or aristocratic sponsor who could provide employment. The patronage networks comprising Moghul society tended to be localized rather than global in focus.

This decentralization extended to the religious sphere as well. The relative lack of a supervisory clerical hierarchy in early eighteenth-century Awadh (when compared with later developments) gave a certain freedom to individual practitioners of various faith groups. Nominal religious designations did not prevent Muslims and Hindus from frequenting each other's shrines. Hindu gurus/renunciants and Sufi sheikhs were consulted by all, regardless of the individual's formal denominational identity.[17]

Labels such as "Islam" or "Hinduism" notwithstanding, South Asian religion can be characterized as "darshanic" (from the Sanskrit term *darshan*:

the "auspicious sight" of a deity, as defined by Diana Eck, where worship involves the opportunity "to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one's own eyes, to see and be seen by the deity"[18]). Darshanic religion involves seeing, yes, but also adorning, clothing, and touching some figural representation of the divine. It is imagistic in orientation, permitting one to have direct contact with the sacred. The Muharram rituals that I witnessed in various parts of India—in Hyderabad, Darjeeling, and Ladakh—all involved some aspect of *darshan;* all drew non-Muslim as well Muslim participants.

The public Muharram observances sponsored by Lucknow's erstwhile Shia aristocracy can also be described as darshanic: the garlanding and incensing of *alams* (battle-standards honoring the Karbala martyrs), the procession of *tazias* (replicas of the Imams' tombs), followed by their immersion in water (a practice akin to the Hindu dismissal of a deity at the close of a ritual). Thus there was nothing necessarily exclusivist in Lucknow's early Muharram observances. Cole comments on this situation as follows: "Sunnis in Awadh genuinely loved and supported Husayn, and the tears they shed for the Prophet's grandson helped soften hard-line Shi'i attitudes toward them. Hindus commemorated Muharram as well, adopting Husayn as a god of death, his bloodstained horse and his severed head lifted aloft on Umayyad staves presenting no less terrible an aspect than Kali Durga with her necklace of skulls."[19] Thus in characterizing traditional South Asian popular religion it would be more accurate to speak of trans-denominational Indian devotionalism than of Hinduism or Islam as if each of the two were mutually insulated monolithic entities.

Cole points out that it was precisely this ambience of interdenominational tolerance that proved repugnant to the newly arrived Shia *ulama* from Iran and Iraq, who fought to aggrandize their own power. These scholars adhered to the Usuli form of Shia jurisprudence, which (in contrast to the more conservative Akhbari school) granted to clerics the latitude to apply *ijtihad* (scripturally-based independent reasoning) to every aspect of life—religious, social, and political. While elevating the exercise of rational skills among jurisprudents, Usulism restricted religious and intellectual independence among the masses. Usuli clerics insisted that members of the Shia laity must select a living jurisprudent as a *marja' al-taqlid* ("reference point for imitation"—a guide whom one follows in legal, moral, and ritual issues). Lucknow's Usuli hierarchy labored relentlessly to demarcate boundaries among the city's religious communities so as to secure their own base of authority. They encouraged the Muharram practice of *tabarra:* public cursing of the first three caliphs, those *sahaba*

(Companions of the Prophet) who are said by Shias to have barred the Imam Ali from succeeding Muhammad as political leader of the Muslim community. This act of cursing served to alienate Sunni Muslims from participating in the annual liturgies; Sunnis revere the first three caliphs for having been companions and supporters of the Prophet. In 1803 the Usuli Sayyid Dildar Ali Nasirabadi gave a ruling to the effect that, with regard to Hindu participants in Muharram, "Until one knew for sure that someone born an unbeliever had accepted all necessary beliefs, he had to be judged an infidel even though he mourned Imam Husayn." Other Usuli clerics interpreted traditional Shia purity laws so as to declare contact with Hindus to be ritually polluting.[20]

The Awadh state itself did not systematically encourage such discrimination. Shias were always a minority, and the government had to rely for support on its Hindu and Sunni subjects. However, events of the mid-nineteenth century (Britain's annexation of Awadh in 1856, the 1857 Sepoy Revolt, and India's failed bid for independence) precipitated a redistribution of power. Awadh's old Shia-dominated government withered, leaving the state's Shia minority vulnerable and no longer able to count on enjoying privileged status. Aristocratic sponsorship and traditional client-patron networks disintegrated, to be replaced by the emergent politics of mass participation. Lucknow's Usuli *ulama* had helped lay the groundwork for political identity along the lines of polarized communalism. And in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the easiest way to mobilize mass participation in politics was by an appeal to religious identity.[21]

Analyses by Sandria Freitag and Keith Hjortshoj clarify developments in Lucknow's Muharram politics in the twentieth century. Freitag argues that the city's Shias, a minority population no longer privileged by state patronage, felt threatened by their precarious status. "It seems likely," she states, "that it was the very fear of being swallowed up by an upwardly mobile and culturally exuberant Sunni community that led Shi'is to reiterate the differences between the sects."[22] This involved not only *tabarra*, but also attempts to reform public Muharram observances in such a way as to re-emphasize the mood of lamentation from which the liturgy takes its origin. Shia community leaders in 1905 published rules intended to be binding on Muharram participants, to include the prohibition of "games (especially characteristic of Sunni *ta'ziya* processions), entertainments, all shops, the chewing of pan, smoking of tobacco, and swearing and jesting."[23] For their part the Sunnis, who had always comprised the majority of Lucknow's Muslims, became increasingly aware of their power in the new world of mass-participation politics. Forming their own *tazia* processions, they pub-

licly chanted *madh-e sahaba* (praise of the "companions," specifically the three caliphs who are cursed by Shias in the practice of *tabarra*).

Hjortshoj, in analyzing Sunni-Shia conflicts during the 1970s, argues that Lucknow's communal riots afforded the Shia community an opportunity to assert their collective identity. "As a distinct category of Muslims . . . Shi'is have rarely come to the surface of Indian society and history . . . Shi'ism would appear to represent a largely hidden aspect of Indian Islam."[24] Hjortshoj attributes this in part to the Shia practice of *taqiyah* ("religious dissimulation"—the concealing of one's identity as a Shia, an action held to be permissible and even meritorious if one fears persecution[25]). Hjortshoj asserts that Muharram clashes with Sunnis gave Lucknow's Shias the chance to move from *taqiyah* to the open assertion of their identity. By doing so, they claimed a place for themselves, given their status as a beleaguered and persecuted minority, by the side of Husain and the Karbala martyrs, as "victims of history," as the righteous few who throughout time have always been assaulted by the tyrannous.[26] The sorry result of such confrontations: since 1977, Lucknow's municipal government has repeatedly banned any form of public Muharram procession.

As is the situation in Lucknow, the Shias of Hyderabad comprise a minority within the city's Muslim community, who in turn coexist with a large Hindu population. But unlike the situation in Lucknow, Muharram processions in Hyderabad have been relatively free from communal conflicts over the years. The reason for this tradition of peaceful observances is linked to Hyderabad's history as an independent "princely state." Muslim informants in Hyderabad reminded me that it was a Shia dynasty, the Qutb Shahi, that had founded Hyderabad (in 1591), and that the Qutb Shahi rulers initiated an enduring tradition of government sponsorship of Muharram liturgies. Sadiq Naqvi, a professor of history at Hyderabad's Osmania University, pointed out to me, in the course of several interviews at his home, that the Qutb Shahis consciously used public Shia rituals to create a "common cultural ethos" among the very diverse peoples of the Deccan. The resultant forms of Hyderabad's Muharram celebrations show to this day the influence of numerous aspects of both Islamic and Hindu devotionalism.[27]

Although the Qutb Shahi state was conquered by Aurangzeb in 1687, the Asaf Jahi dynasty established in its stead by the Moghuls eventually asserted its independence. During the time of the British Raj, the Asaf Jahi realm centered in Hyderabad was recognized as a sovereign Native State. It retained its independence until being forcibly incorporated into postcolo-

nial India when invaded from the north in 1948. The Asaf Jahi Nizams, or rulers, were Sunnis (with the possible exception of the last Nizam), but they retained numerous Shia ministers and continued the Qutb Shahi practice of sponsoring public Muharram liturgies, while ruling over a population the majority of which continued to be Hindu.

Such patronage helped Hyderabadi Shias in identifying the government as their benefactor. The last reigning Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, was widely known to be sympathetic to the Shias and frequently visited Shia shrines and attended *majalis* (lamentation gatherings) during Muharram in the Old City. Particularly important to note is that since independence and Hyderabad's incorporation into India, the government (at both the provincial and municipal levels) has continued the Nizams' old policy of showing support for the Hyderabadi observance of Muharram.[28]

Thus (to take one example) city officials, both Muslim and Hindu, will appear in public wearing traditional black Shia mourning-garb and will wait their turn along the Old City's Muharram parade route to offer garlands and votive cloths to the Karbala battle-standards that are carried in procession by camels and elephants through the streets. Nor is interfaith participation in Hyderabad's Shia rituals limited to the administrative strata of the city's population. During my research there I encountered Hindus in a number of roles related to Muharram: as custodians of Shia shrines, as *alam*-bearers in public processions, as sponsors of *majalis*, and as devotees making offerings at one or another of the chapels in honor of the martyrs.[29]

I was left with the impression that local citizens have never identified Muharram in Hyderabad exclusively with a Shia minority bent on antagonizing other segments of the population. Instead, Hyderabad retains a composite and pluralistic "Muharram culture" akin to Lucknow's syncretistic ambience of the eighteenth century prior to the campaign by Awadh's Usuli clerics to polarize group loyalties. Also distinguishing Hyderabad's "Muharram culture" from twentieth-century Lucknow's is the fact that Hyderabadi Shias (to judge from my personal encounters) generally view the Indian government as a guarantor of their ability to hold peaceful processions, in contrast to the situation in Uttar Pradesh, where Lucknow's Shias have repeatedly been subjected to government bans on processions.

The history cited above held immediate meaning for me. For as I learned about the city's religious heritage during my first summer in Hyderabad, I realized that its pluralistic traditions must have made it easier for local Shias to accept my presence at lamentation rituals in honor of the Imam Husain.

IN HONOR OF ABBAS: CHANT AND LAMENTATION AT THE FLAGELLATION SHRINE

Hyderabad, the morning of Ashura, 1989. I'd slept little all night bracing myself for the ritual. How did I feel about blood, Akhtar had asked. As I lay awake I realized that I could have answered: worried, for starters. Second, afraid that I'd do something foolish, unworthy of a researcher, like faint on the spot. Third, afraid I'd get injured, cut, caught by the backswing of some zealot's blade. Fourth . . .

Towards dawn, exhausted, I finally fell asleep.

But by 8:30 I was standing where I'd promised I'd be: at the entrance to the Hazrat Abbas shrine. Hassan and Muhsin had explained the schedule: throughout the night and on through the morning of Ashura, the Shia associations of the Old City would take it in turn to perform *matam* here. For approximately one hour apiece each group would lead the visitors and pilgrims in chanting, chest-beating, and self-flagellation. Hassan and Muhsin's group would have its turn to lead around 8:30 in the morning.

"There you are!" As he said hello Akhtar seemed to be studying my face. For signs of hesitation, I imagined.

"Shall we?" he said; and leading me by the hand, he plunged us into the crowd.

The entranceway to the Abbas sanctuary is narrow and framed by high walls; the passage makes an abrupt right-angle turn before opening into the shrine proper. I knew the layout from previous visits here to interview preachers and community leaders: a courtyard bordered by a stone walkway. The walkway is roofed and comprises a ledge some three to four feet above the level of the courtyard. In the middle of the yard is a bulky, crudely shaped concrete *mashk*: a massive representation of the flask carried by Abbas at Karbala in his attempt to bring water to Husain's children. At the rear of the shrine is stored a row of *alams*, copies of the crested battle-standards said to have been carried into combat by Abbas and the other Karbala martyrs. On the left the courtyard is framed by tall old buildings overlooking the precincts.[30]

All this I had already anticipated. What I hadn't anticipated was the number of people. Above us the rooftops were filled with girls and veiled women staring into the courtyard. Around us a stream of men and boys, dressed simply in black tunics and trousers, pressed into the entranceway. We were thrust forward by the flow. A sense of urgency: again and again individuals pushed past us.

Preoccupied with safeguarding my camera, I stumbled and fell against my friend.

"Sorry," Akhtar apologized for the crowd. "Soon the *alams* will be coming out for procession. Everyone wants to see. So many people."

We passed the L-turn in the entrance corridor and came to the courtyard. "Courtyard" actually is a polite term. "The pit" is how I described it in my notebook jottings for that day: for my first impression when I entered the inner-shrine space that morning was of onlookers crowded onto the roofed walkway flanking the yard, gazing down from the elevated ledge at the activity in the sunken center of the shrine. There in the pit milled dozens of young men, shirtless, their chests bloody. Repeatedly they struck themselves. In the hands of the teenager just before me I could see the flagellation implement of choice: an old-fashioned razor blade. In my first publication from this fieldwork I kept my description of the business clinical: "The mourner inserts razor blades between the fingers of his right hand; palm open, fingers stiffened, he then beats his breast, the cutting edge of the blades lacerating his chest at each stroke."[31]

A young man whom I'd interviewed explained to me helpfully, "The blood that gets on the blades helps keep them stuck in place between your fingers."

But the comments above fail to convey a detail I noticed as soon as we reached the edge of the pit. As each mourner tired and decided he'd done enough, he flicked his razors free with a shake of the hand. Result: the ground before me was silvered with thrown-away blades.

I flinched, stepped back. Pardonable reaction, if I may say so.

"Your shoes." Akhtar nudged me.

A blank look from me.

"Don't forget to take off your shoes." He'd already removed his thongs. "This is a holy place."

No believer in sandals, I always wore a stout pair of thick-soled Timberlands. A great comfort, these, for keeping undesirable aspects of India from getting too closely underfoot.

Another nudge, and a reproving look.

Off with the Timberlands.

"Shall we?" Once more he led me by the hand. Barefoot, we stepped around the blades and the pooled blood, keeping beyond arm's reach of the flailing mourners in the crowd.

Akhtar steered me to the ledge. He shouted something up to the spectators. Two men reached down grinning and extended their hands. In a flash I was hoisted to the walkway. Akhtar scrambled up beside me.

"Now we have a view." He gestured grandly to the pit.

We did in fact have a view, but I wasn't able at once to appreciate the privilege. Footing was my first concern. The stone beneath my toes was wet, with blood (flailed from the bare chests beneath us) and with rosewater (supervisors from the *matam* groups walked about at the crowd's edge bearing fire-extinguisher-type canisters and spraying participants with perfumed water). The rosewater-blood mix was slippery. From behind me came a writhing push as teenagers pressed forward to see. "Muharram ritual as public spectacle/entertainment" would have been the immediate entry in my notebook, but my attention was taken with keeping my balance and not falling into the razor pit below.

Fierce sunlight. Akhtar had been right to caution me: it was plenty hot in here. The walls boxed in the heat and reflected glare into the pit. But he hadn't thought to prepare me for what my nose would find. All through the night men had been cutting themselves here. From the pit came a smell—sharp, metallic, urine-sour. The smell of blood. (Journal note from the following morning, safely back at the Rock Castle Hotel: "When I get up and walk in yard, I get whiff of stale pee from sewage ditch down the hill. It immediately smells like blood to me, and I flash back to Hazrat Abbas on Ashura.")

To complete the effect: the sound. Across the courtyard, on the far side of the pit, beneath the candle-flame banner of the Moths of Husain, Hassan and Muhsin were just visible in the crowd. With a microphone propped before them, they led a young men's chorus in chanting a lamentation dirge for the martyrs. Hassan's chant voice had impressed me previously for its delicacy and feeling. But today was not the day for nuance. Electric feedback whine squealed from the mike. Hoarsely he led the refrain. In rhythmic unison came the response, as mourners slapped their chests in time to the chant.

Heat, smell, noise, push. I slipped again as someone elbowed forward for a view. But at least I no longer worried about fainting. What with struggling to keep from falling into the pit, and shooting my flagellation-photos, and shielding the camera from ambient bloodspray, I was wide-awake, full of adrenaline: in survival mode.

A sudden sharp sting in my eye. I'd caught a squirt of blood-cum-rosewater, flogged no doubt from someone's chest.

Reaction: disgust. Revulsion. As it was, my hair was matted with guck. Not to mention the state of my shirt and trousers. A mess. Enough.

Another push from behind. A bad moment: I slipped, nearly fell from the ledge, only to be caught before I fell.

Akhtar had been keeping watch. He brought me upright, then locked arms with me and signaled the man on my right to do the same. Thus steadied, I kept shooting, and felt a moment of silent gratitude. I knew I'd been lucky in making the acquaintance of Akhtar. In our first conversation we'd discovered something in common: both of us were teachers. "Then we are colleagues, so to speak," had been his judgment. Since then he'd treated me as his special charge.

"See, the *alams* are coming now." Two custodians in black tunics brought out the battle-standard of Abbas. It was impressive, its metal crest mounted high on a twelve-foot pole, covered with sandalwood paste and draped with votive banners. Through the pit the banners made their way until they stood by the old buildings at the far side of the yard.[32]

From the rooftops the women leaned forward to see. One figure—a woman? a girl? The sunglare made it hard to tell—stretched out her arms as if beseeching someone. The bearers lifted the *alam* until its tip was level with the roof, then dipped it so that it faced the woman. From about her neck she freed a garland—jasmine, I guessed; I'd seen them for sale at a kiosk by the entrance—and she draped it around the crest. Then the *alam* bobbed along the row of rooftop women. It swayed, paused, was garlanded again. Finally, still held aloft, it receded from the courtyard.

"They're taking the *alam* out to the street," said Akhtar, "to join the main procession." The flagellants began to leave the courtyard to follow the standard.

"Let's keep up with them," I suggested. I had the notion of getting better close-up shots of the *alam*. Akhtar looked doubtful but nodded. Carefully I lowered myself from the ledge, tiptoed through the razors, reached the mound of slippers and sandals by the entrance.

A moment of anguish: no Timberlands. Stolen? But there, in the corner: someone had carefully placed the foreigner's footgear to one side.

There. With my shoes back on, I felt invulnerable, or nearly.

Hubris, of course, merits punishment. The surge of confidence got me into trouble at once. In the high-walled entranceway I squeezed forward through the crowd to worm closer to the *alam*. The problem, I soon discovered, was that everyone else was doing the same. More and more tightly the L-bend of the passage filled with men. A few yards ahead of me the *alam* slowed, halted. Its bearers could advance no farther. We were all caught in the L. Traffic gridlock.

What was scary about this was that so much of the traffic was armed. All around me young men waved knives overhead and shouted "Abbas ya Abbas" or "Husain Husain!" Urgently they pushed their way to the *alam*.

"Husain Husain" came the cry. Reaching his goal, each man raised a knife to the pole, touched the blade to the relic in a kind of consecration, then gashed his forehead with the weapon: the type of self-mortification—I learned the term later—called *qameh-zani.*

The surge of men carried me forward. Tighter and tighter was the squeeze of the crowd. "Husain Husain" came the cry. My face was buried in someone's shoulder. Hard to breathe.

The crowd lurched forward. I lost my balance. "Husain Husain."

My feet left the ground. The press levitated me onward, my feet still off the ground, one step, two, three. Then a dead halt: still blocked in the L. Deep breath: fight down panic. "Husain Husain."

"Excuse me, excuse me." Somehow Akhtar had forced his way through and found me. He squeezed in beside me, offered a charming smile of apology to the knife men on either side as he pushed them from me. "My colleague," he explained to the world at large. "A guest."

Not a big guy, Akhtar. Five foot five, maybe; not at all muscular. But he took me by the hand and braved the crush and fought a path for us through the mass: step-squeeze-step, slowly at first, laboring past the relic pole, then rounding the bend in the L, until suddenly the mass thinned and we popped free like corks through a stream.

He waved aside my thanks.

"We have another place to visit," he announced. "Come."

Enough for one morning, I wanted to cry. But he said no, no, just one more stop.

The Inayat Jung was our goal, five minutes' walk away, an old palace now used for Muharram gatherings every year. Little was going on when we entered; most people were out on the street. Beneath a portico an old man in a black frockcoat intoned a *marsiyeh,* a wailing lamentation for the martyrs. Behind him a custodian with a twig broom swept the floor around a display of *alams.*

We sat at the rear. At that instant exhaustion flooded me. For the next several minutes I turned off my mind, released myself from trying to record the details of ritual. I breathed, floated free. Beside me: pots with flowers in them. A sparrow flitting from stem to stem.

Things came back into focus. I looked about, recognized a group of a half-dozen teenagers who had just entered the shrine. They'd been participating in the mourning at Hazrat Abbas when the Moths of Husain led the chant. Very active participants they must have been, too: the white tunics they wore were thoroughly stained with fresh blood. They must have put these shirts on immediately after scourging themselves. Each of the boys

also boasted a white headcloth, bright with blood. So they had also engaged in *qameh-zani*. Badges of honor, I thought.

Proud they seemed as they seated themselves. But not everyone looked approving. Several of the older congregants, spotlessly dressed in clean tunics and trousers, frowned and moved away from where the boys sat. Clean versus unclean, I thought. Worth learning about.

Akhtar gestured to the portico. "Let's pay our respects, shall we?"

Beside the *alam* was a chair with a pair of shears and a long skein of red yarn. As we stepped up onto the portico the custodian bent over the yarn, snipped a length of it, then rubbed it against the *alam*'s gold crest. Akhtar extended his right hand. Swiftly the custodian tied the string around his wrist.

"Now your turn," Akhtar said.

I held out my hand. Expertly the caretaker knotted the yarn.

"Red," announced Akhtar. (I recognized the urge to explain: the mark of the teacher worldwide.) "Red," he repeated. "For martyr's blood." He smiled, held up his yarn-wrapped wrist.

I, too, held out my wrist. "Colleagues," I said.

That made him smile once more.

THREE

Blood, Rationality, and Ritual in the Shia Tradition

THE ANGEL'S GIFT: PURITY AND RITUAL IN RELATION TO ISSUES OF SELF-CONTROL

The angel Gabriel, we are told in a legend recounted by the twentieth-century Shia author Muhammad Maghaniyya, descended to earth and approached Adam at the dawning of human history. Gabriel brought a gift from God, but as with many divine blessings, it comprised both a donation and a test:

> Gabriel said to Adam, "God, may He be praised, has commanded me to present you with a choice. You are to choose one of three things: Reason, Religion, or Shame."
>
> Adam replied, "I choose Reason."
>
> Thereupon Shame and Religion spoke. "Then we, too, will be with you, O Adam. For God has ordered us to keep company with Reason wherever it might be."[1]

"From this account," continues Maghaniyya, "we learn the following truths: Anything rejected by reason has nothing to do with religion. And anyone who lacks reason possesses neither religion nor shame, even if he spends the night praying and the day fasting."[2]

This account is presented in the introduction to a text on the subject of Islamic law. It serves to highlight an assertion frequently made by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Muslim scholars: that religion in gen-

eral—and Islam in particular—is an enterprise that privileges the operation of human rationality.[3]

I mention this point because of its bearing on the issue of self-mortification and blood in relation to Shia mourning rituals. Self-flagellation and other forms of bloody *matam* have for generations been the target of criticism by Sunni Muslims. But Werner Ende, in a study published in 1978, demonstrated that in recent decades Shias, too, have criticized the practice. Ende's study gave particular attention to Muhsin al-Amin al-Amili (d. 1952), a Lebanese Shia scholar who in 1927 wrote an essay condemning ritual self-flagellation as a heretical innovation. Amili's goal, according to Ende, was not to prohibit Muharram mourning altogether, but to facilitate Shia missionary activities by restraining some of the more disturbing aspects of the denomination's rituals.[4]

I am interested in Amili's arguments because they are circulating today in India. In 1997, while visiting Kargil, a town in Ladakh near the border with Pakistan, I was given a copy of a Persian-language pamphlet printed and distributed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The pamphlet is on the topic of Muharram and includes a translation of excerpts from Amili's essay. How I came to be given the pamphlet is a story in itself, involving a group of Ladakhi Shia scholars who have studied Amili's arguments and are eager to reform Muharram practices in India; but this discussion I save for a later chapter. For now I will simply translate a few lines from the Persian edition of Amili's text, where he justifies his condemnation of self-flagellation:

> Because of the effusion of blood associated therewith, it [i.e., ritual self-scourging] is the greatest cause of diseases. It also causes ugly and untreatable wounds. The forbidden status of this practice is secured on the basis of both human reason and Islamic tradition. Preserving oneself from injuries is the sixth Islamic pillar, especially because the Muslim faith is both easy and simple, as the Prophet said: "I have come to you with the Law, which is easy and generous." The removal of [unnecessary] difficulty is also indicated in various passages in the Qur'an, for example: "He has not imposed difficulty on you with regard to religion." [Qur'an 22.78][5]

The Persian edition of Amili's text then goes on to include the following justification for condemning bloody *matam*: "The religion of Islam is the religion of human reason. The true Muslim, thus, is fully reasonable. Therefore every action contrary to reason is without doubt forbidden."[6]

So the coolly reasoning skeptic could argue that the flagellant does violence to Gabriel's gift. Razor wielders harm their bodies; such actions are irrational, flouting the norms of self-interest. Islam is a rational faith; any practice that separates religion from reason debases Islam.

But there is more. The disturbing quality of *zanjiri-matam*—of using knives and chains on one's own flesh—has to do, too, with the ritual status of blood in Islam, and with the elemental fact that scourging brings out blood. "Certain things are *najis* [ritually impure]," we are told in the *Imamiyah diniyat* (Principles of the Shia Faith), a popular-format Urdu-language catechism recently published in Lucknow, "such as urine, feces, and blood."[7] This grouping of blood with waste matter makes clear which aspect of blood is *najis*: blood in its flowing or spurting form, blood that leaves the body. Kevin Reinhart, in his study of ritual impurity, states, "Logically, things from the interior of the body, things that have crossed the boundaries of the body, ought not to be outside the body; when they leave their place, they become impure."[8]

Reinhart goes on to explain what concerns are addressed by Islamic regulations on pollution and related rituals of purification and cleansing:

> What is it that separates the defiling substances [such as urine and feces] from the otherwise benign world? Only, I would suggest, self-control, the human will. Humans, otherwise sovereign in their ritual and practical lives, are unable to avoid releasing defiling substances, however hard they may try. Islamic ritual in many respects echoes the Qur'anic summons to self-mastery, but in this domain the will cannot control the body . . . I would argue that these rituals [of purification] do indeed counteract the events that negate them, but what they undo is not a specific act—not urination, not defecation—but the more general "failing"—the loss of control.[9]

The above discussion of ritual impurity deals with self-control in its physical aspect; but Qur'anic scripture also addresses the moral dimensions of this issue. One of the most famous passages in this regard is from the story of Joseph and Zulaykha (known in the Bible as Potiphar's wife). After she tries to seduce him, Joseph exclaims: "In truth the self continually incites us to evil!" (Qur'an 12.53) The term for "self" that appears here in the Qur'an—*nafs*—refers to the soul in its lower appetitive aspects. A characteristic concern of Islamic morality is self-control. This, in fact, according to a saying of the Prophet, comprises the "greater jihad," the struggle to conquer one's own appetitive impulses, a war that is greater by far than combat against external enemies.[10]

This concern with self-control is reflected in writings by authors dealing with the concept of *adab* or the ideal deportment of the Muslim individual. In an essay on "the classical Muslim conception of *adab*," Ira Lapidus discusses the means whereby the goal of "moderation in behavior" is to be achieved: "Every person must subordinate the animal faculties to the higher faculties and perfect the virtues—temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice—appropriate to each faculty . . . Only when the confusing or corrupting influences of the animal *nafs* are under control is the inherent capacity for knowledge of the truth and vision of God to be realized . . . The true goal of life is to perfect the soul so that the spiritual and divine elements prevail over the material and the satanic. *'Aql* [reason] has to prevail over *nafs*."[11]

It seems to me then that the status of spurting blood as ritually impure is linked to loss of self-control. And I would argue that by extension bloody *matam* is seen by some critics as an instance of conspicuous moral failure, as a breakdown of ethical restraint. Reason has failed to prevail over impulse.

Seen from this viewpoint, bloody *matam* apparently violates Gabriel's grouping of reason and religion. But what about the third of the angel's gifts: the sense of shame? Here it is important to note—as I have discussed in other studies—that Muharram self-mortification practices characteristically take place in a group setting, not in solitude, and that these rituals typically occur in public, on the street, before the eyes of fellow Muslims and non-Muslims.[12] Shame implies not only an inner awareness of sin but a consciousness of disgrace in the estimation of others; and it is precisely this sense of public disapproval that is emphasized in the text by Amili that I noted earlier. This pamphlet states, "The wounding of one's own head, which offers neither worldly profit nor reward in the afterlife, constitutes molestation of the self, which is forbidden in divine law. Accordingly, this practice has made Shias of the Prophet's household the object of scorn in the eyes of men; it presents Shias as savages. There is no doubt that this practice has arisen from the whispered temptations of satans."[13]

This notion of public scorn is reprised later in the same pamphlet:

> If we were to imagine that these practices were not to be classified as forbidden, then such acts, which have already been the cause of shame and disgrace to the tradition, would without a doubt make people altogether disgusted with such a faith. Such acts would certainly stimulate the tongue of ill-speaking against our religion. There is no doubt that this playing with knives, these acts of shameless wailing—carried out, moreover, in the presence of others and at public thoroughfares [here the Persian translation has inserted a note: "especially

> nowadays in Iran, before the eyes of all foreign nations"], and these savage habits and barbarisms with which God and the Prophet and the Imams will never be pleased . . . there is no doubt that these obscene acts are to be considered forbidden rather than meritorious.[14]

But if the public dimension of bloody *matam* can be a source of criticism for skeptics, it can also explain part of the appeal of this practice: the chance to demonstrate one's denominational affiliation before others. In an essay entitled "Islamic Attitudes Toward the Human Body," Michael Winter makes the following point: "Like Judaism but unlike Christianity, Islam emphasizes 'orthopraxy,' right behavior or practice, rather than orthodoxy, right belief. In other words, one participates in the meanings of being a Muslim through ritual action, not merely through a profession of faith."[15]

What applies to Islam in general applies to Shiism in particular. To rephrase Winter's statement: one participates in the meanings of being a Shia through the ritual of *matam*, which has the same assertive and demonstrative qualities as have the *sajda* (prostration) and *rak'a* (ritual bowing) in universalist Islamic prayer. Precisely because bloody *matam* is controversial and generates cries of "Shame!" in some onlookers, it serves as a communal boundary marker and as a way of asserting group identity, a point I develop in later chapters.

VARIETIES OF LOVE-DEATH: BLOOD AND MARTYRDOM IN THE SHIA AND SUFI MYSTICAL TRADITIONS

Earlier I noted blood's status as *najis*, ritually polluting; but one major exception should be noted: the blood of martyrs. The wounds of those slain for the faith are not a source of impurity. On this topic Louis Massignon remarks, "The washer of the dead does not wash the blood off the clothes of the fighter killed in holy war. Martyrdom outranks the Law, snatches mercy from God before the legal ablution."[16] Hence the privileged status of martyrs' blood on Judgment Day. The *Sahih al-Bukhari*, a collection of *hadith* (sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad), records the following statement: "[There is] no one wounded for the cause of God whose wound, at the Judgment, does not bleed again, its color the color of blood, its scent the scent of musk."[17]

It should be acknowledged at once that the legal tradition in Shia Islam differs from Sunnism on the question of martyrs' blood. According to

Maghaniyya's text on Islamic jurisprudence, "The four schools of Sunni law all agree that blood is ritually impure, with the exception of the blood of martyrs . . . but the Imami Shias assert the impurity of blood . . . regardless of whether the person is a martyr or not."[18] To secure the opinion of a local Shia authority, I contacted Seyed Ali Ghazvini of the As-Sadiq Foundation in Pomona, California. "Regarding your question about [the] status of blood in Shia *fiqh* [jurisprudence]," he wrote in reply, "as far as I know, blood in Shia *fiqh* is *najis* [ritually impure] and there is no exception. This fact is mentioned in all Shia *fiqh* books."[19]

And yet I would argue that at the level of popular devotion Shia Islam has been influenced by the Sunni legal position on the purity of martyrs' blood; and I would speculate that in this regard the medium of influence has been the Sufi or mystical tradition in Islam. Important for the present study is the fact that Sufism has assimilated and elaborated the vocabulary of martyrdom. Muslim mystics have developed the two meanings of the term *shahadat*: the act of dying as a martyr on God's behalf; the act of publicly giving witness or testifying to one's faith. Sufis sometimes describe their experience of God in terms of *fana'*: the "extinction" of one's ego-focused identity. Thus the Sufi experiences a martyr's death in the moment of *fana'*: his individual selfhood has been annihilated as a result of his consuming love for God. The eleventh-century Sufi author Ali ibn Uthman al-Hujwiri borrows from the scriptural vocabulary of martyrdom in the following statement:

> When a man's spirit is sacrificed, of what value are his wealth and his health and his frock and his food? This is the foundation of Sufism. Someone came to Ruwaym and asked him for direction. Ruwaym said: "O my son, the whole affair consists in spiritual sacrifice . . ." And God said: "Do not call dead those who are slain in the way of God. Nay, they are living." (Qur'an 2.149)[20]

The Qur'anic passage quoted by Hujwiri is normally applied to the *mujahideen* killed on the battlefield, the holy warriors martyred in the jihad. But Sufism numbers among the martyrs those mystics who give up everything for the divine Beloved.

In her study entitled *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* Annemarie Schimmel says of the Iranian mystic Kharaqani: "Longing for God made him melt away, but the Lord told him, in one of his rare dreams after long periods of sleeplessness, that the longing he had endured for sixty years was nothing, 'for We have loved thee already in the pre-eternity of eternities.' . . . And he

was sure that he would be resurrected among the martyrs, 'for I have been killed by the sword of longing for Thee.'"[21]

"Martyr of love" is the term Schimmel uses to describe those Sufis who have discarded everything of this earth in their passion for God.

Building on the shared status of lovers and warriors as martyrs, mystic authors have applied to Sufis the special status of blood associated with battlefield wounds. Farid ud-Din Attar, a thirteenth-century Iranian poet, tells the fable of Sheikh Sam'an, a rigidly orthodox and learned Muslim who "fifty times had made the Pilgrimage. He fasted, prayed, observed all sacred laws . . . [and] split religious hairs in argument."[22] But his life is turned upside-down when Sam'an falls in love with a beautiful Christian girl (who symbolizes God and God's power to confound our normal understandings of religion).

Sam'an turns into an abject love slave. For the sake of this Christian girl he goes to Rome, becomes a swineherd, and drinks wine, all to be near her. Sam'an's orthodox disciples try to reason with him, crying out that he should revert to his old pieties and rituals. Perform the *ghusl*, they urge him (this is the purificatory ablution with water which is required before prayer if one has just had sexual intercourse or has otherwise incurred ritual impurity). But Sam'an is defiant: "'In blood I cleanse myself,' the sheikh replied, / 'In blood, a hundred times, my life is dyed.'"[23] His ablutions henceforth are to be in blood: a substance normally ranked as *najis* but now transformed into an acceptable purifying fluid because the "bloodshed" involved is Sam'an's annihilating martyrdom under the spell of love.

Sam'an's bloodshed was metaphorical, symbolic. Harshly physical, however, was the martyrdom of Husain ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, a tenth-century ecstatic mystic who was publicly executed in Baghdad by order of the caliphal state on a charge of heresy (he had been accused of blasphemous utterances about his spiritual union with God). Attar relates a legend concerning Hallaj and his response after the executioners performed the first stage in his punishment by cutting off his hands. With his bloody stumps Hallaj carefully rubbed gore over his face, "so that both his arms and his face were stained with blood." When onlookers in the crowd shouted at him, demanding to know what he was doing, Hallaj replied calmly:

> "I was making ablution."
>
> "What ablution?"
>
> "When one prays two *rak'as* [ritual bowings] in love," Hallaj replied, "the ablution is not perfect unless performed with blood."[24]

According to Massignon, "Attar, in a bold way, depicts Hallaj challenging the Law that renders invalid any ablution performed with an impure liquid (like blood); therefore we have here a sort of beginning of the Turkish theme of divine mystery being revealed by the red rose, 'which has arms all smeared with blood, like the lover.'"[25] The linking of flower imagery with martyrs' blood is widespread not only in Turkish poetry but in the Persian-influenced Islamic culture of South Asia, as we will see below in my discussion of Muharram poems from India.

The heedlessness and disregard for one's own physical well-being shown by individuals such as Hallaj is sometimes explained in Sufi literature in terms of the word *jadhbah*: rapture, an overpowering attraction to God. Hujwiri discusses the term in his work *Kashf al-mahjub* ("The Unveiling of the Veiled"):

> So long as the [Sufi] seeker's progress is connected with acquisition (*kasb*) it is pernicious, but when the attracting influence (*jadhb*) of the Truth manifests its domination all his actions are confounded . . . On this subject Shibli says in verse—
>
> I am lost to myself and unconscious,
> And my attributes are annihilated.
> Today I am lost to all things:
> Naught remains but a forçed expression.
>
> . . . Accordingly, absence from one's self is presence with God, and vice versa. God is the lord of the human heart: when a divine rapture (*jadhbat*) overpowers the heart of the seeker, the absence of his heart becomes equivalent to its presence with God.[26]

A person in this state is said to be *majdhub*, "one overpowered by divine attraction." Schimmel refers to "the type of the *majdhub*, the 'enraptured one' who, under the shock of a mystical vision or any psychological experience, is bereft of his senses and walks around in a fashion prohibited by the religious law." Such individuals, Schimmel reports, are said to be "completely lost and submerged in the divine unity, their eyes 'like two cups filled with blood' [a description taken from the writings of the fifteenth-century author Jami], inspiring awe, and at times shocking people by their behavior."[27]

This particular aspect of mysticism—the disregard for boundaries, a carelessness about offending the conventionally pious—is also conveyed in Sufi literature via imagery linked to activity classified in Islamic law as

forbidden: the consumption of alcohol. "It is related," Hujwiri tells us in his eleventh-century treatise, "that Yahya ibn Mu'adh wrote to Abu Yazid: 'What do you say of one who drinks a single drop of the ocean of love and becomes intoxicated?' Bayazid wrote in reply: 'What do you say of one who, if all the oceans in the world were filled with the wine of love, would drink them all and still cry for more to slake his thirst?'"[28]

The reader senses a note of rivalry here, something one sometimes encounters in gatherings of mystic practitioners: a competitive can-you-top-this spirituality, as dervishes (would-be and otherwise) cast sidelong glances and size up each other according to degrees of divine rapture.

Something of this is reflected in Attar's story of an assembly of Sufis, told in the form of a parable that employs an image very popular in Islamic poetry, that of the moth and flame. According to Attar, moths gather one night near a candlelit palace. They wish to learn more about the flickering light to which all of them are attracted.

One moth offers to explore the palace to learn the flame's secrets and return with news. This first volunteer flies toward its goal until in the distance it sees a candle burning in a window of the building. Attracted but afraid of harm, the moth gazes from afar, then hurries back to the group. The sheikh of the moths belittles the explorer's report: "He knows nothing of the flame."[29]

A second volunteer gets farther. Through the gates it flutters, past the door, into the palace, until it comes so close to the candle it can feel its heat. But no closer: its passion for the light is not strong enough to draw it into a flaming love-death. Like the first moth it, too, retreats to the group with word of what it has seen. But the presiding sheikh dismisses the second report as it did the first: neither bears the signs of a devotion that is truly heedless of self.

A third volunteer, however, proves itself to be *majdhub*, so attracted by the candle as to surrender everything for the sake of union: "He dipped and soared, and in his frenzied trance / Both Self and fire were mingled by his dance— / The flame engulfed his wing-tips, body, head; / His being glowed a fierce translucent red." The sheikh presiding over the moth brotherhood looks on from afar and approves: "He knows, he knows the truth we seek, / that hidden truth of which we cannot speak."[30]

Hallaj, too, made use of moth-flame symbolism, imagining himself as a winged creature drawn to the luminous blaze of divine union. His description acquires poignancy in view of the public martyrdom to which he would one day be subjected:

> Until dawn the moth circles about the candle, and then he returns to his companions, reporting to them in the sweetest speech about the

state associated with the glow. And in his flight he takes delight in the flickering play of the flame: he longs to reach its perfection . . .

Not enough for him is its light, not enough is the heat from it. So, finally, he hurls his whole being into it.

Meanwhile his companions await his return and his report to them of what he has seen, since they know he is not one to be satisfied with mere talk passed on by others. But at this very instant he is annihilated, reduced to nothing, made to vanish. There remains of him nothing: body, name, record, fame: gone.[31]

My interest in such texts derives from the fact that the Shia tradition has adopted from Sufism much of its vocabulary and symbolism. To take one example: the twentieth-century Iranian Shia scholar Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i uses the Sufi term *jadhbah*, "divine attraction," to describe that force "which draws the attention of the God-centered man toward the transcendent world and awakens the love of God in his heart. Through this attraction," Tabataba'i asserts, "he forgets all else." But Tabataba'i substitutes the Shia Imam for the Sufi sheikh as the human master who guides the believer "toward the transcendent world."[32]

At the level of popular piety Sufi poetic imagery has been borrowed by *matam* associations such as Hyderabad's Parwaneh-ye Shabbir, the "Moths of Husain," the group that I introduced in a previous chapter. Like several other of Hyderabad's largest lamentation guilds, this association publishes its own text of *nauhas* or Muharram poems. The collection is printed in an inexpensive chapbook edition, the cover of which is illustrated with the guild's insignia: a radiant candle, its flame surrounded by moths. What follows is my translation of the first poem in this text. It is authored by a poet named Allamah Najm Effendi:

Truly, within these very breasts, our hearts are lamentation shrines for Husain;
Our heads are flooring stones of the doorway of Husain's house.
We will tell throughout the world his story.
Praise, o give praise, to the beloved splendor of Husain;
We are his lovers, the moths of Husain.

We are his lovers, who offer our lives for him,
Husain, who thirsted for two days,
who received not even a taste of water at the moment of slaughter;
Fatima's beloved offspring, Muhammad's grandson.

Praise, o give praise, to the beloved splendor of Husain;
We are his lovers, the moths of Husain.

This head was severed in the moment of making prostration to God.
A deathly sleep came to him who had awakened the world;
he fell asleep in the dust storm, having lit a lamp for others.
Praise, o give praise, to the beloved splendor of Husain;
We are his lovers, the moths of Husain.

No one has ever seen or heard of
such lamentation for any sultan.
Never before has there been such *matam*
for one who announced the word of the Qur'an.
For thirteen hundred years there has been wondrous *matam*.
Praise, o give praise, to the beloved splendor of Husain;
We are his lovers, the moths of Husain.

May this effort be acceptable;
perhaps through this means pardon and forgiveness will be attained.
Najm, you, too, join these moths and say:
Praise, o give praise, to the beloved splendor of Husain;
We are his lovers, the moths of Husain.[33]

Several features of this poem are worth noting. It is marked first of all by an extravagance of emotion that displays the participants' loyalty to the Imam: "Our hearts are lamentation shrines . . . our heads are flooring stones . . . we are his lovers, who offer our lives for him." But where the Sufi moth demonstrated the force of the *jadhbah* working on him by plunging into the flame, the Shia shows his love for Husain by the strength of his *matam*: "No one has ever seen or heard of such lamentation for any sultan. Never before has there been such *matam*."

Next, although the chanters' stated intent is the commemoration of the past ("we will tell throughout the world his story"), in fact the poem's real focus is the guild that celebrates the ritual in the present moment. Self-references give this poem its structure. Each stanza closes with the refrain: "We are his lovers, the moths of Husain." This is important to note because poems such as this are performed in public every year at sites such as the Abbas flagellation shrine described earlier, where one guild after another takes its turn in directing the congregation's *matam*. "We are his lovers, the moths of Husain": this refrain is not only a cry of devotion but an identity marker that serves to label the group.

This signature motif is especially useful in a public setting such as the Abbas sanctuary. There is an unmistakably competitive air to gatherings where several *matam* guilds are present and each holds center stage in turn. The men who escorted me to rituals often commented on the vigor—or lack thereof—of the *matam* displayed by each group. A poem such as this advertises the name of its reciters even as it headlines the strength of their devotion.

Finally, it is worth noting in the closing stanza the use of a literary device called the *takhallos*: the poet has inserted his own name into the verse, an artifice familiar from classical Persian poetry. "Najm, you, too, join these moths and say: Praise, o give praise." Typically in Muharram *nauhas* (as seen in later examples) the poet uses the *takhallos* to include himself among the mourners. But here Najm Effendi employs the device in such a way that it blends in a natural progression with the verses that have been repeated at the end of each stanza. As the refrain is chanted the final time, the poet has been caught up in the circle of winged creatures around the flame: "We are his lovers, the moths of Husain."

The preceding *nauha* can be compared with the title poem from a chapbook collection published in Hyderabad entitled *Yeh matam kayse ruk ja'ay* ("How Could This *Matam* Ever Cease?"). The author's name is Ali Javid Maqsud; his poems are used by various Hyderabadi guilds such as the Moths of Husain and The Immaculate Ones:

Having given all the wealth of the two worlds,
we must preserve this sadness.
We must live for the sake of Husain;
we must die for the sake of Husain.
This body might survive; it might cease to be;
yet *matam* in honor of the one wronged must be performed.
May Fatima's desire be fulfilled,
regardless of whether our life survives.
This *matam* is a prayer for Fatima;
how could this *matam* ever cease?

For the sake of this banner's glory, Abbas offered his own arm.
For the honor of this banner, the warrior took the lance in his heart.
Sakina's wails have become entangled with the waterskin of this banner.
This is the banner of Abbas Ali; how could this banner ever bow low?
This *matam* is a prayer for Fatima;
how could this *matam* ever cease?

Abbas, Husain's warrior chief, what can be said of him?
The one who scaled heavenly heights of loyalty,
the one who wore the crown of loyalty.
Even now, waves still surge
since you retreated thirsty from the shore.
It was Husain's command that you not pause to fight;
you bore every wound, you endured every wrong.
For as long as he was conscious, one thought prevailed:
his niece should not continue in thirst.
This *matam* is a prayer for Fatima;
how could this *matam* ever cease?

For as long as there is strength in this body
one must perform one's duty.
If fate were to grant us this happiness,
we must give away this life of ours as a sacrifice.
Either with tears, or with heart's blood,
we must dampen our tunics with weeping.
A princess has arrived, one who has come to offer hope.
This *matam* is a prayer for Fatima;
how could this *matam* ever cease?

In our eyes, even now is that time when Ali's son fell bathed in his own blood.
On the battlefield, there resounded the complaint and cries for help of one afflicted.
Even if streaks of blood now flow from our breasts,
may our hands never cease:
Let this *matam* continue on behalf of the one who was wronged,
for as long as Fatima's cry comes forth.
This *matam* is a prayer for Fatima;
how could this *matam* ever cease?

This *matam* is the echo of Husain's prayer, of Husain's call for help;
each tear is part of a passionate desire for victory.
Thus even now there is an opportunity to come toward truth.
Recognize the cry of heart and mind; join in this *matam* lamentation!
Even now Husain is calling; if a free man is present, let him come forward!
This *matam* is a prayer for Fatima;
how could this *matam* ever cease?[34]

As in the previously cited *nauha*, this poem's ostensible focus is the commemoration of past events from Karbala. The first stanza announces: "We must preserve this sadness." Stanzas two and three describe Abbas, who had his arms hacked off and died bringing water from the Euphrates to his niece Sakina. And there are repeated references to Fatima, Husain's mother, who died centuries ago.

But Fatima is used to bridge past and present. Shias in Hyderabad whom I asked about Karbala frequently mentioned beliefs to the effect that Fatima to this day mourns in heaven for her son. Seeking company for her sorrow, she is invisibly present at every lamentation gathering in Husain's honor. And more: she takes comfort from these liturgies of grief. The refrain points to the poem's real focus, the ritual action performed in the present day: "This *matam* is a prayer for Fatima; how could this *matam* ever cease?"

The self-references in this poem are characterized by extravagance of emotion: "This body might survive; it might cease to be; yet *matam* in honor of the one wronged must be performed." As with the Sufi moths drawn to the flame, love prompts a conspicuous carelessness for one's own physical well-being.

The last three stanzas intensify the focus on the present-day mourners while blurring the boundary between past and present. "For as long as there is strength in this body," begins the fourth stanza, "one must perform one's duty." The Association of the Moths of Husain, which reprints this poem in its chapbook, offers the following statement in the membership application form to be accepted and signed by anyone wishing to join the guild: "Henceforth I will consider chest-beating to be my religious duty." And this poem goes on to link the duty to mourn Husain with the vocabulary of martyrdom: "If fate were to grant us this happiness, we must give away this life of ours as a sacrifice. Either with tears, or with heart's blood, we must dampen our tunics with weeping."

The next stanza begins with a vivid picture of Husain "bathed in his own blood." Then comes a reference to the Karbala battlefield, followed immediately by a shift forward in time: "Even if streaks of blood now flow from our breasts, may our hands never cease: Let this *matam* continue." Blood from self-scourging has now mingled with the gore of battlefield wounds. Through the practice of *matam*, today's flagellants are assimilated to the status of warriors slain in the path of God. The poem generates an equation: mourners' blood is martyrs' blood.

The final stanza completes the identification of past with present. "This *matam* is the echo of Husain's prayer": this is my translation of the line *Yeh matam bay hal min ki sada*. Embedded in this Urdu verse is an Arabic phrase

(*hal min*: "Is there anyone . . . ") that recalls a celebrated speech from the Karbala tragedy. Just before combat began between Husain and Yazid's forces, the Imam cried out, "Is there anyone who will come to my rescue for the sake of God? Is there any person who will dispel the danger that threatens the ladies of the Prophet's house?"[35]

This incident is recounted by the Shia author Mustafa Husain Sahib in a pamphlet printed in Lucknow entitled *What Happened at Karbala?* His account tells of the effect that the Imam Husain's cry had on one of Yazid's soldiers, Hurr ibn al-Riyahi:

> Hurr walked away from his regiment and stood alone and silent. He was trembling. Muhajir ibn Aus accosted him thus, ". . . I am surprised to notice your disgraceful condition as you are shaking with fear."
>
> Hurr replied, "I tremble not for fear of battle, but because I have to choose between heaven and hell, and by God, I shall never prefer anything to heaven, even if I am flayed to bits and burnt for it."
>
> So saying, he spurred his horse and galloped away towards Husain. He put one hand on his head and cried, "O God, forgive me and accept my repentance."[36]

To express his repentance, Hurr fought beside Husain and died a martyr. Another version of this story, written by the Ayatollah Hibat ud-Din ash-Shahristani, puns on the fact that in Arabic the name Hurr also has the literal meaning "free man." According to this version, as Hurr lay dying on the battlefield Husain saluted him with the words, "Thou wast a free man as thy mother named thee in this world, and thou art blessed in the next."[37]

The final stanza of the *nauha* assumes a knowledge of this history on the audience's part. After alluding to Husain's call for help, the poet states, "Join in this *matam* lamentation! Even now Husain is calling; if a free man [Hurr] is present, let him come forward!" That is, the present-day bystander at a Muharram procession faces the choice of Hurr: if he has a martyr's courage he can answer Husain's battlefield call today by stepping forward to join the ranks of those who perform *matam*.

This *nauha*'s refrain, *Yeh matam kayse ruk ja'ay* (How could this *matam* ever cease?), provides the title for the chapbook anthology in which the poem is printed. The illustration on the cover of this chapbook is worth describing. It shows a writhing mass of men clustered around a battle flag on which verses are inscribed praising Husain. Surmounting the flag is a *panje*, a hand symbolizing the five members of the Prophet's family: Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, her husband Ali, and their children Hasan and Husain. The men

grouped around the flag are performing *matam*: one slaps his chest, another scourges himself with a *zanjir* flail, a third gashes open his forehead with a knife. Their clothes in tatters, these men are shown engulfed in flames.

How to understand this picture? The weaponry and battle flag suggest sacred combat, the jihad. *Matam* ritual is presented here in terms of battlefield imagery. But the flames, the men's torn clothing, their closed eyes and upward-turned faces suggest the effects of passionate love. Martyrdom and mystical self-abandonment: this chapbook cover summarizes the poem's themes.

The following *nauha* comments on the ritual status of the martyrs' blood referred to in the preceding poem. This *nauha* is entitled "Karbala: Come to the Best of Deeds." It is printed in the chapbook of the Moths of Husain:

> Karbala achieved the preservation of Muhammad's religion.
> Karbala is where the prophets prostrated themselves in prayer.
>
> In the dust storm of tyranny is the search for truth.
> Thirst performs with its wounds the ablution for prayer.
> Behold the intimate speech between God and the servants of patience.
> Until Judgment Day the voice of truth is Karbala.
> Karbala achieved the preservation of Muhammad's religion.
>
> Karbala is the record of the blood shed in thirst.
> Karbala is the key that unlocks the Qur'an.
> Karbala is the destiny of Islam.
> Karbala achieved the preservation of Muhammad's religion. . . .
>
> When the land of the Kaaba became boastful
> suddenly a voice came forth from the celestial Throne:
> "Where is there within your borders such auspicious dust of healing?
> Above you Karbala is exalted in rank!"
> Karbala achieved the preservation of Muhammad's religion.
>
> In what realm can the like of this dust be found?
> In the land of thirst is the palace of tears.
> Karbala: come to the best of deeds.
> Karbala is the furthest limit of divine servitude.
> Karbala achieved the preservation of Muhammad's religion. . . .
>
> They have set fire to Sakina's garments.
> Again and again she was scourged by Shemr.

Burning wounds increased the thirst.
Karbala is a miracle of thirst.
Karbala achieved the preservation of Muhammad's religion.[38]

Like all such poems in this genre, the above *nauha* presumes in its audience familiarity with the details of the events linked with Husain's death. Thus the composer does not attempt to create a sustained narrative, preferring instead a style that is atomistic and evocative.

The poem is an encomium to Karbala itself. Because of the deaths that occurred here, this site is now consecrated. Karbala is said to have saved the Islamic faith. For those with esoteric understanding, the events of Karbala become the means for unlocking the hidden meanings of the Qur'an.

But this *nauha* can also be read as an assertion of Shia pride. When "the land of the Kaaba" (the Arabian peninsula, known since the establishment of the Saudi-backed Wahhabi movement as a source for the sporadic persecution of Shias) becomes boastful, God's voice announces that Karbala outranks the Kaaba for the "auspicious dust" it holds. The privileging of Karbala over the Kaaba takes on extra force when one realizes that the poem's title—"Come to the best of deeds"—forms part of the Shia *adhan* or call to prayer. The public chanting of this phrase, like the exalting of Karbala over the "land of the Kaaba," marks a community as distinctively and defiantly Shia.

Note, too, the vocabulary in this poem: dust, desert, burning. All these words heighten the sense of deprivation, the lack of anything to drink in this "land of thirst." And thirst in fact becomes personified as if it were one of Husain's band. Deprived of water, which is normally required for the ritual washing before prayer, Thirst makes use of the only liquid available: the blood from the wounds of the martyrs. This line also reflects a legend to the effect that even on the battlefield Husain's warriors were so pious that they paused to pray at the required hour.[39]

In May 1998, while completing my translation of this *nauha*, I showed the Urdu text to some of my Muslim students in an undergraduate course on Shia Islam I offered at Santa Clara University. We came to the verse "Thirst performs with its wounds the ablution for prayer," and immediately the line triggered a reaction. "Oh, that means *a lot* of blood!" exclaimed one student, a young woman from India. "When I make *wuzu* [prayer ablution] I need plenty of water, half a bucket at least. That means the martyrs bled a lot." Her response suggests the raw force of this imagery for anyone to whom such ritual is meaningful as a daily lived experience.

This verse also illustrates the point I made earlier, that in Shia popular devotion blood (ordinarily seen as *najis* or ritually impure) becomes purifying

when shed in an act of martyrdom. Hence at Karbala it could substitute for water as a cleansing agent. As I noted above, however, many Shia legal authorities have refused to accept the ritual purity of spurting blood under any circumstances. The split between popular piety and legal-mindedness can be illustrated by a conversation I had in Hyderabad in 1991.

One afternoon I was invited to the home of Agha Mohammed Hussein, a prominent local businessman and the president of a firm called Bio-Visual Products. Agha Mohammed had just completed the production of a video documentary entitled "Muharram in India," which included footage of mourning rituals at shrines in Hyderabad. Together with a group of his friends we watched the film.

One scene from this video impressed me in particular. A group called Shaddai-ye Shabbir, "Lovers of Husain," performed *matam*, striking themselves again and again. The camera moved away from the group abruptly, to offer a lingering shot of a great red sun sinking in the sky. Then the camera returned to the mourners.

"At the battle of Karbala," Agha Mohammed explained when I asked about this shot, "the sun itself was bleeding at sunset." He added that he wanted to bring out the notion that everything in creation participated in grief for Husain on the day of his death.

This remark gave me an opening to ask about controversies relating to *matam*, especially forms of *matam* involving bloodshed. I mentioned an incident I'd recently witnessed at a *majlis* held in the inner courtyard of a shrine in the Old City. The congregation was listening intently to a preacher's sermon when a crowd of teenaged boys came in from the street who'd clearly just left a procession where they had been scourging and cutting themselves. Their shirts were sticky with blood, their headcloths splotched red from forehead-gashing. The boys sat down quietly enough, near the back of the courtyard; but I noticed several older gentlemen edge away with what I took to be distaste. Later I asked one of these men about the boys. "Dirty." He made a face. "They rush in here like that without changing their clothes or washing away their blood. They want to show off how much they've been cutting themselves."

My hosts responded to this story by acknowledging first of all that many Muslims, including some Shias, criticize the practice of bloody *matam*. But the men watching the video with me drew my attention to the importance of *niyyat* (personal intention) in the performance of ritual (which, as Frederick Denny states in his text, *An Introduction to Islam*, "ensures a proper mental and spiritual attitude, free from both rote repetition and casualness"[40]). *Matam*, one of the men said, should be done out of love for Husain, not to show off.

"*Niyyat* transforms the act," commented Agha Mohammed, "and this extends to *matam* when it involves shedding one's own blood." Another Shia present in the room interrupted to illustrate this principle of *niyyat* with an anecdote concerning one of the sons of the Ayatollah Khui who visited India and was taken on a tour of Hyderabad during Muharram.

"A problem came up," my informant explained, laughing, "every time we'd visit a shrine where the *matamdaran* [mourners] were cutting themselves and swinging their chains. Of course we kept getting sprayed with blood. And the Ayatollah's son insisted on being taken home to change each time his clothes were stained with blood. But for us Hyderabadis," he asserted, "our love for Imam Husain is such that this blood is pure, not *najis*."

The symbolic significance of blood in the context of Husain's death is reflected in the following verses taken from the chapbook collection of a Hyderabadi guild called Guruh-e Ja'fari. The text was published in 1990:

> Whoever has true knowledge of Karbala knows
> that to Karbala the Prophet's religion owes a great debt.
>
> The blood of the Karbala martyrs has blossomed;
> the desert of Karbala has become a rose garden.[41]

These lines may be compared with the Muharram laments of a celebrated nineteenth-century Urdu poet, Mir Babar Ali Anis. In the following verses Anis describes the corpse of the martyred Husain:

> There are nineteen hundred wounds
> of sword and lance and axe.
> From the blood of the stones of violence
> this body has become a rose and tulip garden.[42]

Underlying this imagery is the fact that the garden is one of the foremost images of the heavenly afterlife in Qur'anic scripture. The functional equivalence of blood and water in the verses presented earlier, where martyrs' wounds offer fluid for ablution, is maintained in the poems just cited. In Shia popular devotion the spilt blood of the martyrs is life-giving, generative: it irrigates Karbala's desert sands and makes it bloom with roses. Husain's corpse blossoms with salvific wounds, bright flowers of Paradise.

This blood image has a long history in Persian literature, as can be seen in the following excerpts from the poems of the fourteenth-century poet Hafiz of Shiraz:

And where the tulip, following close behind
The feet of Spring, her scarlet chalice rears,
There Ferhad for the love of Shirin pined,
Dyeing the desert red with his heart's tears.[43]

At dawn in a tulip meadow
I said to the early breeze,
"What martyrs must be buried here,
here in their blood-stained shrouds?"[44]

A. J. Arberry's commentary on this poem compares Hafiz's verse with one of the *Ruba'iyyat* of Omar Khayyam (the translation is Edward FitzGerald's): "I sometimes think that never blows so red / The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled."[45]

This imagery retains its force in Iranian society today. As noted by scholar Lynda Clarke, "In popular Shii martyr culture [in Iran] blood also has positive associations. Martyrs are (this phrase was a favorite during the Iran-Iraq war, and was translated exactly as I give it here) *laleh-ha bi-khun khufteh*—'tulips clotted in blood' . . . Thus a certain cultural background, combined with the Shii martyr-ethos, have united at least in the Iranian context to make blood redeeming rather than a polluting substance."[46]

The Urdu texts quoted in this chapter demonstrate that the same Sufi-Shia sensibility linked to blood and love martyrdom is very much operative today in South Asian Muslim poetry.

The mystical dimension of Muharram poetry is brought out in the following poem. The author's name is Uthman Asif Sabi'; the text is printed in the chapbook of the Hyderabadi guild Guruh-e Ja'fari. This poem is written in Persian. Guruh-e Ja'fari is one of the few *matam* groups remaining in Hyderabad that still performs chants in Persian as well as Urdu, taking pride in this fact as evidence of the high cultural refinement of its members:

Peace be with you, o you of exalted rank; salaam!
O king of martyrs, salaam!

The ruby of wisdom now shares with you
the same color and the same secrets.
O pearl of the ocean of Gnosis, salaam!

Your heart is full of the deepest secrets and essence of subtleties;
it serves as a receptacle of the Qur'an: salaam!

Each rose effaces itself in prostration at your door;
the nightingale of mystic sight, too, recites praise in your honor: salaam!

Listen to what cries of blessing my spirit gives forth:
The poet Uthman offers his life as a sacrifice for you: salaam![47]

As in many other Muharram poems, this *nauha* is directed to *shah-e shahidan*, the "king of martyrs," Husain. But rather than visualize the torments of the desert battle, this text evokes a different mood, one of serenity and peace. Here the Imam is praised in terms derived from the vocabulary of Sufism. The pairing of the rose and nightingale is commonplace in mystical poetry. Schimmel speaks of "the divine presence fulgent as a marvelous red rose. Since this flower reveals divine beauty and glory most perfectly, the nightingale, symbol of the longing soul, is once and forever bound to love it."[48]

There is one reference to the violence of Husain's death, but it is discreet. His blood-stained corpse matches the color of the ruby of wisdom. "The ruby is the heart of the stone" (again I rely on Schimmel's discussion of Sufi symbols) "which has been transformed into a priceless jewel through patience and shedding its blood."[49]

The poet thus acknowledges Husain's death but passes on at once to praise a quality that transcends death: mystical knowledge. "O pearl of the ocean of Gnosis, salaam!" The phrase translated by "ocean of Gnosis" is *darya-ye 'irfan*. *'Irfan*, "gnosis," can also be rendered as "esoteric insight." Moojan Momen's study of Shia Islam notes that *'irfan* is often linked to interpretations of the Qur'an that bring out scripture's inner or hidden meanings.[50] This should help us understand the reference to Husain's heart as a "receptacle of the Qur'an." The Persian phrase is *ribl-e Qur'an*. The word *ribl* refers to a bookstand, a frame to hold a copy of sacred scripture.

This verse in turn can be linked with a line from one of the *nauhas* cited earlier:

Karbala is the key that unlocks the Qur'an.
Karbala is the destiny of Islam.

The events of Karbala—Husain's passion and death—become a framework for the Qur'an: a structure for understanding the patterns of sacred history hidden beneath the surface of Qur'anic narrative. After Karbala, the lives of the Prophets as recorded in Islamic scripture take on new meaning. The experiences of Abraham, Joseph, Jesus, and others can be seen to conform to a model: the innocent suffering, throughout time until Judgment

Day, of those who choose to give witness publicly to their submission to God.

Shia Gnostics share with Sufi masters the feeling of being a select minority within Islam. Shias and Sufis alike perceive a reality unnoticed by the multitude. For Shias the means of access to this secret is participation in the events of Karbala. With this thought in mind, read the following verses from the Anjuman-e Ma'sumeen, the Hyderabad-based Association of the Immaculate Ones:

> Karbala is a jihad, Karbala is steadfastness.
> You have given a message which will endure until the Day of Judgment.
> The spirit of Karbala, the secret of the world's origin
> and the mysteries of creation.
> Hail, beloved Husain, O beloved Husain.
>
> Lord of life, conqueror of death,
> Light of the ancients, unveiler of eternity,
> Karbala is your everlasting citadel.
> Hail, beloved Husain, O beloved Husain.
>
> Reference to Hurr is on every page of the story,
> he who heard the sound of truth,
> the inner meaning of the *adhan*, the call to prayer,
> he who heard and came forward, the morning of Karbala.
> Hail, beloved Husain, O beloved Husain.[51]

Hurr is a personage we encountered earlier: a kind of "Good Thief" figure, no sinless saint, one of Yazid's soldiers, in fact, who nevertheless repented of his wrongdoing just in time to die for Husain and enter Paradise. Implicitly we are invited to act as did Hurr. Everyone hears the *adhan*, the call to prayer; few listen to its inner meaning. Those who do listen will do what they can to enter the "ocean of Gnosis" through their experience of Karbala every year at Muharram.

One more example of Sufi-influenced Muharram poetry from South Asia: what follows is from a chapbook entitled *Bayaz-e matam* ("The Book of *Matam*/Mourning"). I bought a copy in Pakistan at a popular Shia shrine in Lahore called Karbala Gamay-Shah:

> In the rose garden,
> the early morning's breeze from the east

searches only for you.
On the tongue of the nightingale
is there talk
of no one but you.
Your creative power
shows its splendor
in every color.
Whichever flower I smell,
your fragrance is there.[52]

This poem offers Qur'anic imagery together with familiar mystical vocabulary: the gardens of Paradise, the rose and nightingale. The statement, "On the tongue of the nightingale is there talk of no one but you," illustrates a Sufi concept called *lisan al-hal*, "the tongue of circumstance." Every being in creation, to the extent that it can, gives utterance to its circumstance, to its state of separation from the Creator and desire for reunion.[53] No explicit reference is made anywhere in this poem to Husain or the other Karbala martyrs. Only the setting of these verses, embedded as they are within a "book of *matam*," invites us to modulate our understanding of the text. The Beloved of whom the nightingale speaks could be understood as God; alternatively the subject might be the Imam, whose blood transformed the desert into a rose garden. Indirection governs this poem.

THE AESTHETICS OF SHIA MUHARRAM POETRY: EXPERIENCE, MEMORY, AND PERFORMANCE CONTEXT

A word, here, about the aesthetics of Shia Muharram poetry as felt experience. To appreciate the force of the *nauha* one must allow for the synergistic effect of performance context. Most Muharram participants hear the poem rather than read it, and they do so in a group setting—often crowded elbow to elbow, amidst good smells and bad, rose water, incense, bodies pressed together for hours. All this, in the presence of visual markers—banners and battle crests draped with flowers, against a background of noise: groans, sobbing, the expressions of heightened emotion. To sit alone and read the text on a printed page: this is like seeing an icon in a museum.

And one must also allow for the weight of personal experience and private memory that a participant brings to the encounter with Muharram poetry. I can best explain what I mean by way of anecdote. In the spring of 1994 I was living in Philadelphia and working on my Urdu with the help of

a Pakistani tutor, a graduate student from Lahore. I'll call him Ahmad. Ahmad was an ideal tutor, a sensitive scholar and a skilled reader of Urdu poetry. Ahmad was also a self-described secularist and cynic. Worldly and sophisticated, he told me he had a detached attitude toward his own religious heritage as a Muslim.

Every Thursday afternoon that spring we met on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania and sat on a bench on the lawn outside Van Pelt Library. I brought the text of whatever poem I was translating that week. Ahmad would smoke cigarettes—Dunhill Internationals, I remember—and listen patiently as I stumbled my way from one stanza to the next. He'd nod encouragement and interrupt to correct my translation or simply recite a favorite verse to give me an idea of how the poem should properly sound.

Then one day we started in on a twentieth-century Pakistani poet named Mustafa Zaydi. The poem with which I'd struggled that week was called "Karbala, O Karbala." On this particular Thursday Ahmad seemed quieter than usual; but I was too entangled in participles and perfectives to pay his mood much mind. In silence he smoked his Dunhills as I labored through verse after verse:

> After all that has happened to the Imam of the encampment
> where mouths were parched with thirst,
> Whom could I tell? How could I speak?
> Karbala, O Karbala!
>
> How could the story be told,
> of wretchedness and shame?
> A family of exalted lineage,
> driven forth in dishonor.
>
> A water flask in which
> the tongues of arrows slaked their thirst.
> A green banner has been lowered
> into the midst of dust and blood.
>
> A sigh that rose forth from the breast
> has been lost in the desert wastes;
> A light that has failed
> in the declining hours of the day.

That corpse of the lionlike family,
of the family of the Prophet,
That corpse of Ali Akbar, who had once slept
in the lap of the reciter of Qur'anic verses.

That corpse, its arms hacked away,
of one who had guarded the battle flag;
That corpse of Ali Asghar, the infant who drank milk
as it listened to lullabies.[54]

A litany of corpses: a register of martyrs. Then I came to the deaths of Zaynab's children, Aun and Muhammad, two very young boys much loved by their uncle Husain:

The innocent youths, who had endured
the taunts of the barbarians:
Aun and Muhammad, who stretched forth their hands,
so small, so small.[55]

And at that my tutor burst into tears. None too discreet, either: real sobs. Loud.

This caught me by surprise. Here we were, far from any Muharram setting, on the campus of a major research university, two scholars, connoisseurs (we might have styled ourselves) of the Urdu textual icon. For us the icon was safely bloodless. Remote, under glass. So it seemed. But Ahmad had just proved me wrong.

I handed Ahmad a kleenex and waited. A student wandered by, saw us, retreated. Probably embarrassed, like me.

"Sorry." Ahmad, too, was embarrassed. "Sorry." He lit another cigarette. And then he explained, or tried to.

What had made him cry was the phrase "stretched forth their hands, so small, so small." It evoked one of the saddest things about Karbala, he said: the helplessness of the children killed centuries ago, their weakness and innocence. Thinking of this made him remember Muharram poetry he had listened to years ago as a boy in Lahore. Not this poem precisely, he said—this one had been published relatively recently, in the 1970s—but poems like it, with similar images of innocent children wrongly made to suffer.

He paused, spoke further. When he was little his father always used to take him and his brothers to *majalis*. Just two days ago he'd talked long-

distance on the phone with his parents. There'd been a quarrel. Old issues came up, family troubles. Somehow, he said, reading this poem made him remember the phone call.

I didn't press him for more details.

He tapped the Urdu text. "Let's finish translating, shall we?" Back to our connoisseurship.

But since then this Philadelphia reading has stayed in my mind. As a teacher I read Muharram poetry with my undergraduates in the course I offer on Shia Islam, and I listen to the complaints about these poems I occasionally get from students (some of them Muslim, some not). Too repetitive, they say. Too much blood, too gross. How could anyone like this kind of poetry, let alone get worked up enough to cry over it?

I try to transmit the insight I learned from Ahmad by way of example from my own life. I have an old Roman missal that contains the Latin text of the *Pange Lingua.* To convey the importance for me of this hymn, I tell my students, it wouldn't be enough simply to translate the text into English and explain that it's about Christ's crucifixion. I would have to say something about how this text works for me associatively, how it triggers Good Friday memories from years past, memories of hearing the hymn chanted as an altar boy while I carried an oversized candle in procession and tried to hold it upright so hot wax wouldn't spill on my cassock. Memories, too, from more recent years, of being an altar server in a Jesuit parish in Philadelphia, and volunteering at a Good Friday service to act as one of the acolytes holding a seven-foot crucifix for the veneration of the cross, while hundreds of people came to the front of the church, one after another, to kneel and kiss the feet of the corpus. I cannot separate the Latin text on the page from the emotional force of the ritual I experienced.

One builds up one's own set of associations with a text, I tell my students, and one adds to it over a lifetime. The frontispiece of my old missal is a picture of Christ on the cross. Blood streams from his legs down the cross to the earth. The blood at the foot of the cross is shown as a stream of water. Two deer drink from the stream. For inscription the picture carries the single word *Sitio,* "I thirst," the cry of the dying Jesus. He thirsts so that we may drink.

I show the missal to my students and tell them that I have owned it for decades. But in recent years, I explain, the picture has acquired added significance for me. Christ thirsts in his moment of death; so, too, did the Shia martyrs, and the blood they shed was not lost but served to create a garden. Any text, any icon, depends for its effectiveness on the memories

and associations brought to the viewing by the participant. I have seen enough Muharram blood for Ashura to become blended in my mind with Good Friday. Golgotha. Karbala.

FOUR

"Would That You Could Bury Me, Too, Beside My Brother!": Women's Roles in Shia Devotional Literature

INTRODUCTION: MUHARRAM ETIQUETTE AND MALE-FEMALE ROLES IN PUBLIC RITUAL SETTINGS

My knowledge of women's Muharram in Hyderabad was altogether secondhand until one hot afternoon in August 1989 in the town's Old City neighborhood. I was supposed to interview an informant at his place of work, a storefront not far from the crumbling archway of the Inayat Jung palace. He had promised to show me the private shrine set up by his family behind the shop.

I'd spent what seemed like forever trying to find the place, first by rickshaw, then on foot. I dodged trucks and bicycles, asked passersby for help, got bad directions. Frustration. Thirsty and grit-grimed, I finally found the shop, only to enter and find no one at the counter.

But from behind a closed door, at the rear of the shop, I could hear movement. That must be the shrine, I thought. He's in there fixing things up for the evening's gathering. Too impatient to wait as I should have (and impelled by hopes of being offered something to drink), I opened the door and stepped through to the rear.

No sign of my friend. But I'd been right: this was in fact the family shrine. The room was dark; no light except from dim electric bulbs over-

head. Before me at the very back was a small wooden stage, hung with black curtains. On the stage was a row of upright *alams*, the battle-standards of the Karbala martyrs. The metal crests seemed of brass, old and well-rubbed. One reared up in the shape of a *panje*, the mystic protective hand that warns away evil. Another bore the form of Dhu'l-fiqar, the Imam Ali's sword.

But those things were of lesser interest. Before the *alams* were grouped some two dozen women dressed in black, slapping themselves, chanting a hymn to the martyrs. An old woman, also in black, led the chant. In unison they beat their breasts.

Somber and intense. Much like the men's gatherings I'd seen so many times. Fascinating. By instinct I reached for my notebook.

Then among the women nearest me I noticed one in particular. Young, visible only from the back. Veil loosened, with fine dark hair undone and streaming freely: and at that moment it struck me how wrong my presence was. Knowing my Euripides well enough not to want to play Pentheus to anyone's Maenads, I stepped back through the door and withdrew.

Glimpses of a parallel universe: this was what I started with in my knowledge of women's roles in Shia lamentation. But even though—by necessity—I focused on the men's guilds in my Hyderabad studies, nevertheless I gradually formed a series of impressions concerning women's participation in Muharram; and I also learned to what extent it was permissible for a male foreigner to indulge his curiosity.

To offer another impression: two nights after my peeping-Pentheus encounter, I attended a Muharram *majlis* at another shrine in the Old City. I sat with the males in a courtyard facing the platform where teenaged boys and young men performed *matam* before a row of *alams*. The teenagers windmilled their arms with force as they beat themselves. A circle of chanters stood before the battle-standards and led the hymn that established the rhythm for the *matam* stroke.

For half an hour I watched the action on the stage and took notes. Then I noticed something to the right of the platform: an alcove or a gallery of some sort, its entrance shrouded with a purdah. The curtain billowed as if touched by a gust of air. As I studied the archway I could just detect the movement of silhouettes. At first I thought I saw three, maybe four, individuals. Then I realized that the alcove was filled with row upon row of seated figures.

A nudge from the man beside me. "The ladies," he whispered, and he nodded toward the alcove. Having given his explanation, he turned his face firmly toward center-stage and the men performing *matam*.

I followed his example and returned my attention to the men chanting before me; but a minute later my glance wandered back to the alcove. The

curtain had been lifted. The gallery entrance was crowded with women, as plain to see as you pleased. One—an older woman—held the curtain overhead, pushed to one side against the wall. Three girls stood tiptoe to peer forward over their friends' shoulders. All seemed eager to get the best view they could of the action. They murmured to each other and pointed at the men.

Interesting. But one of the older women in the alcove caught me staring. We locked eyes for a moment. An instant later the curtain dropped back into place.

"The ladies are in purdah." This from the same gentleman who had spoken to me earlier. His tone: one of weary patience, as when one has to explain things twice to an idiot.

I took the hint, glued my gaze front and center. Five minutes later, the curtain lifted once more. But this time I had the sense to do no more than flicker a glance in the women's direction. The curtain stayed up, the women stared at the male chanters with their view unobstructed, and the men pretended that the women were cloistered and invisible.

I had learned a lesson in Muharram etiquette. For a man, politesse dictates that one ignore the women as they satisfy their desire to watch the chanters and *matam* groups perform. "Best not to see the ladies," was one man's reply when I asked about the lifted curtain. Averted eyes in the men's quarter allowed women to maintain the fiction of purdah. I was impressed by the delicacy of interaction I witnessed that day.

Overall my impression from Hyderabad was that the emotional intensity and degree of women's participation in Muharram can vary considerably. Informants told me that in many *majalis* it is typical for children to run about in the women's section while mothers chat back and forth. To be set beside this data, however, is something I saw during my second Muharram season in Hyderabad while visiting the Hazrat Abbas shrine on the morning of Ashura in 1991. Within the courtyard I saw a few young women with bloodied foreheads who had wrapped white gauze bandages about their heads. When I pointed them out to my companions, I was told that these women had performed *shamshir-zani* (gashing their foreheads with knives), and that Hyderabadi women will occasionally vow to shed their own blood on Ashura in one of the severer forms of *matam* if their prayers to *Ahl-e Bayt* (the Prophet Muhammad's family) and the Karbala martyrs are answered. This conforms to Ja'far Sharif's observation with regard to Indian Islam in general that "women often make vows to be performed at the Muharram."[1]

Noteworthy also is a 1988 fatwa issued by a religious scholar, Hujjatul Islam Seyyed Mohammed al-Moosavi, in a readers' question-and-

answer column in the *Ja'fari Times*, an Indian Shia newsletter. Someone had written the newsletter to ask whether it is permissible for women to watch men perform *matam* with implements, when the men have stripped to the waist to scourge themselves. The mullah's reply was that women should not watch acts of *matam* performed by men who are not family members.[2] Despite such strictures, however, one cannot help but observe that at the great public *matam* ceremonies on Ashura, at the Hazrat Abbas shrine and all along the route of the main *alam* procession in Hyderabad's Old City, women and girls openly crowd rooftops, balconies, and stairwells to watch the flagellants.

In this context it is worth noting the important research undertaken by Mary Hegland in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province. While studying Muharram rituals among Shia women in the city of Peshawar, Hegland observed how the performance of *matam* and the creation of lamentation chants became implicated in instances of competitiveness, the achievement of social status, and opportunities for artistic expression—much as is the case among the Shia men's groups of Hyderabad.[3]

I note above that the degree of women's participation in Muharram seems to vary considerably. In devotional literature and in the performance genre of the sermon, however, women's roles are more consistently highlighted. An example is a sermon given by a Hyderabadi preacher named Hyder Zaydi on August 3, 1989, at the shrine of Hazrat Abbas. In his talk Hyder narrated a story which can be summarized as follows:

> There was once a widow, old and blind, who lived alone save for one devoted daughter who cared for her. Every year at Muharram the daughter arranged the family *ashurkhana* [the Hyderabadi term for a Muharram chapel], brought out the *alams*, and oversaw preparations for the *majlis* to be held in the family shrine. But then one year, just before the onset of Muharram, the daughter died of a sudden illness. After her funeral the mother cried out, "Who will arrange my *majlis*? O God, this year Husain and his mother will not come to my home."
>
> Then came a knock on the door. Four women stood there, saying they were strangers and that they needed someplace to stay. The widow agreed to house them, but only if they would supervise the *majlis* to be held in her home. The four women accepted, and they arranged the lamentation assembly with such success that the walls themselves groaned aloud in grief at the sorrowful *marsiyehs* [dirges] and sermon which were recited in that household. The old woman was very pleased, for all believers want weeping at their *majlis*.

> Afterwards, however, the widow could only offer *tabarruk* [pastry sweets traditionally prepared for guests at a *majlis*] by way of payment to the four women who had prepared the successful liturgy. The women accepted the food with thanks; and suddenly the strangers stood revealed as the Lady Fatima and the women of Karbala: Zaynab, Umm Kulthum [Zaynab's sister], and Sakina [the Imam Husain's daughter]. Holding aloft the *tabarruk*, Fatima looked up and cried out, "See, my son, how your people venerate us!"[4]

This pleasing tale (with its *xenodochia* motif reminiscent of Abraham's hospitality to the disguised angels in Genesis 18.1-8 and the Greek myth of Philemon and Baucis) was succinctly explained to me after the sermon by the preacher himself: "I wanted to demonstrate the devotion that we should show today to the Holy Family during Muharram."

In the following section I explore representations of Fatima and the "women of Karbala" in Shia devotional literature, both medieval and modern. I will give particular attention to Fatima and Zaynab, women who in the stories and poems recited about them are made to embody various understandings of the significance of suffering.

FATIMA THE RADIANT: ETERNAL SORROW, CELESTIAL LIGHT

Mother of the Imams Hasan and Husain, wife of Ali and daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, Fatima is universally honored in Islam but is given special reverence by Shias. Among Fatima's outstanding qualities was her great love for her father, which led her to participate whenever possible in the trials he underwent.

In this context it is worth noting the scholarship of the French orientalist Louis Massignon, who in his numerous studies on Shia devotion to Fatima emphasized her central role in the Mubahala, an incident that occurred in year 10 of the hijrah. A delegation of Christians from Najran met with the Prophet and debated the nature of Jesus and his divine sonship. Finally, each side agreed to a public confrontation, in which they would call down God's curse on those in error.[5]

Accompanying Muhammad were only the closest members of his family: Ali, Hasan, Husain, and Fatima, whom Massignon characterized as a "hostage" for the validity of her father's prophetic message. Whatever consequences were to befall Muhammad for his outspoken articulation of

the Qur'anic message, Fatima freely accepted that she, too, share in these consequences.[6]

Massignon developed this concept by speculating that upon the Prophet's death, Fatima and the other members of Muhammad's family household entered into what Massignon called "une substitution judiciaire solonnelle": a solemn judicial substitution. That is to say, supporters of the Alids transferred to Fatima and her children all their hopes for justice; while opponents of the Prophet, namely various Umayyads and others who had lost family members in combat against Muhammad's forces at the battles of Badr and Uhud, now turned their desire for vendetta against Fatima and her offspring. Massignon emphasized that Fatima accepted freely her task of being the focus of the community's hopes and hatreds.[7]

So devoted was Fatima to her father that she died of grief within a few months of the Prophet's death. During this final period of her life, according to Shia sources, Fatima had been abused by Ali's political rivals. Abu Bakr prevented her from inheriting property bequeathed her by the Prophet. Umar, in a confrontation one day at Ali's home over the right to the caliphate, suddenly shoved open the door of the house, thereby striking Fatima and breaking several of her ribs. She was pregnant at the time; the trauma caused her to miscarry and give birth to a stillborn son, Muhsin. This child "died as a martyr," says Massignon, "a prototype of all the 'Holy Innocents' of Islam." By linking Fatima's son with the infants killed at King Herod's orders in the Gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus, Massignon shows his characteristic tendency to seek out parallels in Shia and Christian spirituality as well as his sympathy for Shia (as opposed to Sunni) understandings of sacred history.[8]

Nor was Fatima spared the burden of foreknowledge: the angel Gabriel visited her (as described in more detail below) and gave her news of the persecution that would be visited on her surviving offspring in the years to come after her death. Because of such sufferings, Fatima is believed by Shias to share with her son Husain the power of *shafa'ah* (the privilege to intercede with God on behalf of sinners). Even while in Paradise Fatima is believed to grieve continuously for Husain and to descend to earth to be spiritually present at every lamentation gathering held in remembrance of her son. Husain and Fatima will exercise *shafa'ah* on behalf of anyone who remembers the Karbala martyrs and honors them during the month of Muharram. I will return to the question of intercession when discussing present-day Shia liturgical practices and twentieth-century reinterpretations of the "Women of Karbala."[9]

The qualities associated with the Prophet's daughter in the medieval period can be discerned in the *Mafatih al-jinan* ("The Keys to the Gardens of Paradise"), a popular devotional anthology compiled by the modern-day Iranian author 'Abbas Qummi (d. 1941). The compilation is recent; but Shia scholarship assigns some at least of the prayers in Qummi's collection to the tenth and eleventh centuries A.D., while other hymns and invocations from the anthology are ascribed to members of the Prophet's family in the seventh century.[10] Following are excerpts from the *Mafatih* of prayers meant to be addressed to Fatima al-Zahra' ("al-Zahra'," "the radiant," is one of the most common honorific titles associated with the Prophet's daughter):

> Peace be with you, O you who were afflicted with trials by the One who created you. When He tested you, He found you to be patient under affliction . . .
>
> Peace be with you, O mistress of the women of the worlds. Peace be with you, o mother of the vindicators of humankind in argument. Peace be with you, O you who were wronged, you who were deprived of that to which you were entitled by right . . .
>
> God's blessings on the immaculate virgin, the truthful, the sinless, the pious, the unstained; the one who is pleasing to God and acceptable, the guiltless, the rightly guided, the one who was wronged; the one who was unjustly overpowered and dispossessed by force of that to which she was entitled; the one kept from her lawful inheritance, she whose ribs were broken; whose husband was wronged, whose son was slain; Fatima, daughter of your Prophet, O God, flesh of his flesh, innermost heart of his heart . . . Mistress of women, proclaimer of God's friends, ally of piety and asceticism, apple of Paradise and eternity . . . You, O God, drew forth from her the light of the Imams.[11]

The litanies recorded by Qummi bestow on Fatima the title *sayyidat nisa' al-alamin:* "mistress of the women of the worlds." The title suggests her status as exemplar and role model for Shia women; and the citations quoted above offer some indication of the virtues she is held to exemplify. The *Mafatih* catalogues the injustices visited on Fatima, emphasizing her status as guiltless victim and her patience in suffering. Rather than describe her as an agent, a doer, these passages characterize Fatima in terms of passivity. She endured injustice, withstood the test of affliction, and served as the source from which God drew forth the light of her descendants the Imams.

What emerges is a portrait of innocence wronged: a devotional parallel, it could be argued, to the political quietism favored by the Shia community as a whole throughout most of Islamic history.

Thus it seems that the medieval Shia sources portray Fatima al-Zahra' as an archetype of the sorrowing mother. But these same sources are careful to note that God rewarded her for what she endured. Following is an excerpt from the writings of al-Kulayni, a tenth-century legal authority and compiler of one of the most celebrated collections of Shia *hadith* literature:

> Fatima survived for seventy-five days after God's prophet, during which time a great sorrow for her father entered her. So the angel Gabriel came to her and was able to console her for her father's death. He healed her soul and gave her knowledge concerning her father and his station and rank. And Gabriel also gave her knowledge concerning what would happen after her time to her descendants. And Ali [Fatima's husband] wrote all this down. And this comprises "the Book of Fatima," peace be upon her.[12]

Note how this passage heightens Fatima's dignity and rank. First it credits her with the gift of divine foreknowledge; then it characterizes Gabriel's communication to her as *mushaf Fatima*, "the Book of Fatima," a term reminiscent of the phrase *suhuf Ibrahim wa-Musa* (the books of Abraham and Moses) from Qur'an 87.19 (cf. also Qur'an 53.36-37). Not that Kulayni is venturing so far as to assign the "Book of Fatima" scriptural status on a par with the Qur'an; to do so would amount to impiety. Yet in a text-oriented tradition such as Islam, the linking of Fatima's name with angelic revelation, together with the assertion that this revelation was recorded in book form, constitutes a very high form of praise. The implied parallel with her father's experience is also remarkable. Muhammad was visited by Gabriel, and the Prophet's companions wrote down what was revealed; Fatima, too, was visited by the angel, and her husband served as recording scribe.

Kulayni also refers to Fatima in his scriptural exegesis of Qur'an 24.35, the well-known "light verse," which begins with the following words: "God is the light of the heavens and of the earth. His light may be likened to a lamp-niche; within it is a lamp. The lamp is within a glass. The glass is like unto a glittering star, which is enkindled from a blessed tree, neither of the east nor of the west. Its oil gives light almost of itself, even if untouched by fire. Light upon light." Kulayni comments on this Qur'anic passage as follows:

> Concerning God's word, may He be exalted, "God is the light of the heavens and of the earth. His light may be likened to a lamp-niche," Abu Abd Allah [i.e., the Imam Husain], peace be upon him, said the following, "Fatima, peace be upon her: 'Within her is a lamp.' Hasan is 'the lamp within a glass.' Husain is 'the glass, like unto a glittering star.' Fatima is a 'glittering star' among the women of the people of the lower world, a star that 'is enkindled from a blessed tree.' Abraham, upon him be peace, is 'an olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west,' neither Jewish nor Christian. 'Its oil gives light almost of itself': Knowledge virtually bursts forth by means of it. 'Even if untouched by fire. Light upon light': that is, one Imam after another proceeds therefrom."[13]

In both the medieval and modern eras light-imagery has long been popular in mystical Islam as a way of describing one's intimate direct experience of the Divine.[14] In accordance with the Shia tradition of viewing the Imams as the believer's means of access to God, Kulayni here takes the Qur'anic vocabulary of radiance and applies it to Hasan and Husain and their descendants. In this exegesis the lamp-niche is allegorized as Fatima, within whom repose her sons Hasan and Husain, "the lamp" and "the glass." In this womb metaphor she is described as the birthplace and source of the light of the Imams.

Kulayni takes his exegesis further, describing Fatima as a celestial being, foremost of the women of this lower world, linked in a kind of mystical genealogy with her spiritual forefather Abraham: starfire kindled from olivewood. Fatima the Radiant, conveyer of illumination to her future offspring, unites celestial hierarchies, light upon light, with their earth-origins from the Abrahamic past.

Fatima's key role as both daughter of the Prophet and mother of the Imams led to Shia meditations on what Louis Massignon calls the "five-fold personhood of Fatima." He cites a medieval Shia text in which the first humans created by God ask Him for a vision of Paradise:

> He showed them a Being, adorned with a myriad glittering lights of various colors, who sat on a throne, a crown on her head, rings in her ears, a drawn sword by her side. The radiance streaming forth from her illumined the whole garden. When the first humans asked, "Who is this?," the following answer was given to them: "This is the form of Fatima, as she appears in Paradise. Her crown is Muhammad; her earrings are Hasan and Husain; her sword is Ali."[15]

FATIMA KUBRA AND SAKINA BINT HUSAIN: DRAMATIC PATHOS AND THE SUFFERING OF THE MARTYRS

Of the many personages associated with Karbala, the ones who figure most prominently in Shia devotional literature are those whose stories are linked with scenes of pathos. Later I discuss the role of pathetic evocation and commemorative liturgy in Shia soteriology. For the moment I will simply introduce two of Husain's daughters, Fatima Kubra and Sakina, who, precisely because they are believed to have suffered so much, recur frequently in religious narratives of Karbala.

For the story of Fatima Kubra I rely on the Persian-language *Rawdat al-shuhada'* ("The Garden of the Martyrs") authored by Husain Wa'iz al-Kashifi (d. A.D. 1504). Kashifi's detailed and vividly imagined descriptions of the Karbala martyrs' torments have been used for centuries in Shia Muharram gatherings. Especially in the Safavid era, during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, "it became popular," notes the scholar Moojan Momen, "to organise meetings at which this book was recited to the accompaniment of much weeping and wailing. These meetings became known as *rawda-khani* (recital of the *Rawda ash-Shuhada*) and the reciters became known as *Rawda-khans*, which soon became a profession in its own right."[16]

Kashifi's literary style is typical of the genre of storytelling in an oral performance setting for public entertainment in Middle Eastern and North African societies of the pre-modern era: the narrative is presented in prose format interspersed with brief citations of poetry. The poetic verses act as a commentary on the prose action, usually providing an emotional response to some dramatic confrontation or act of violence that just been presented in the prose portion of the text.[17]

Reference to Fatima Kubra appears in Kashifi's description of the battlefield death of her fiancé, Qasim ibn Hasan, son of the second Imam (Hasan had been murdered years earlier, according to Shia sources, by order of the Umayyad caliph). Both Fatima and Qasim are young, of beautiful appearance (this is part of the tragedy of their fate); both have traveled in Husain's entourage to Karbala. Shortly before the final defeat, Kashifi tells us, Qasim begs his uncle to let him go forth to fight; but Husain, along with Qasim's mother (also present at Karbala), refuses the boy permission.

At a loss what to do, Qasim withdraws to his tent. Thereupon he remembers an amulet he is wearing, bound to his upper arm, given him years before by his father. Open it, Hasan had instructed him long ago, only in a

moment of great sorrow and distress. Now is that time, Qasim decides, and he opens the amulet, to find a message in his father's handwriting: "Qasim, I leave you this legacy and command, that when you see my brother Husain in the desert of Karbala, in the hands of treacherous Syrians and faithless Kufans, then exert yourself on the battlefield. Offer yourself as a ransom for Husain. This is the key to the gate of martyrdom and the means of attaining heavenly acceptance and happiness."[18]

Racing from the tent, Qasim shows his father's bequest to Husain. The Imam now yields to Qasim's wish but reminds him that he, too, has a command to fulfill from Hasan: that the families of the two Imams be further united through first-cousin marriage. Husain then takes his nephew to Fatima Kubra's tent and orders Qasim's mother to dress the boy in his father's clothes. "With his own sacred hands," Kashifi says, Husain fastens a beautiful turban atop Qasim's head. Thereafter, the text continues:

> He performed the wedding and joined the girl to Qasim in marriage and gave her hand to him and then left the tent.
>
> His hand in hers, Qasim was gazing at her; when suddenly a cry came from the army of Umar Sa'd [commander of the enemy forces]: "No other champions remain!"
>
> Qasim released his bride's hand and started to leave the tent. She seized the skirt of his garment and said, "Qasim, what are you thinking? Where do you intend to go?"
>
> Qasim replied, "O light of my eyes, you know what I intend to do. I intend to try to ward off the enemy. Release the skirt of my garment. For our wedding feast will take place on the Day of Resurrection."[19]

Fatima Kubra obeys; but the young woman's affection, her fear, her desire not to lose her husband, all are conveyed implicitly by the words Kashifi has her speak in response:

> "Qasim, you say that our wedding will take place at the Resurrection. But on the Day of Resurrection where shall I seek you? By what sign shall I know you?"
>
> He replied, "Seek me in the company of my father and grandfather. By this torn sleeve shall you know me." Then he raised his hand and tore his sleeve.[20]

Thereafter, amid the wailing outcries of the attendant women, Qasim leaves the tent to be killed in battle; and Fatima Kubra is left to face

humiliation and imprisonment. Kashifi's chapter on Qasim and Fatima closes with the young bride lamenting her husband's death in verse.

The emotional force in the Qasim-Fatima episode is generated by Kashifi's juxtaposing of tragic antitheses: love/warfare, wedding/sudden death, celebration/lamentation, union/loss. Latter-day observers have questioned the historicity of this account, doubting whether this battlefield marriage ever took place.[21] Earlier sources, too, are significantly silent on this issue. For example, the tenth-century Shia authority Shaykh al-Mufid, in his biography of the Imams entitled *Kitab al-irshad,* describes in detail the battlefield death of Qasim but says nothing of his marriage to Husain's daughter.[22]

No matter. Shia communities throughout the world annually reserve the seventh of Muharram to commemorate *nausha-ye Karbala'* (the bridegroom of Karbala) and the marriage of Qasim and Fatima Kubra. The hymns recited on that day, together with the processions held in honor of the Karbala wedding, capitalize on the same pathetic qualities as does Kashifi's narrative, and with the same purpose: to evoke a tearful emotional response in *majlis* congregations.[23]

The portrait of Fatima Kubra that emerges from Kashifi's account is one that emphasizes her fear, lamentation, and distress—epitomized in a single gesture as she clutches at her husband's clothes in an effort to prevent his death. By drawing our attention to the gesture, Kashifi contrasts the husband's resolve with Fatima's anguish. The emotional tension between the two characters heightens the sense of pathos for the audience hearing the story.

Fatima Kubra's younger sister Sakina, who was also present at Karbala, is likewise portrayed in Shia devotional texts in such a way as to evoke the pathos surrounding her fate. Barely four years old at the time of the battle, she suffered from thirst during the siege and eventually died in captivity in Damascus. I give further attention to the depiction of Sakina's sufferings when I discuss the genre of the *nauha* in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Shia lamentation poetry. Here I wish to consider the very distinctive way in which the figure of Sakina is employed in an Arabic-language Shia *hadith* collection entitled *Bihar al-anwar* ("The Oceans of Illuminations"), authored by the Iranian jurisconsult Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1698).

Majlisi used his scholarship to define Shiism over against the Sunni form of Islam. There is a didactic orientation to his presentation of many of the *hadiths* contained in the *Bihar,* whereby he narrates incidents from Karbala so as to articulate Shia theological doctrine. Consider the following account, in which Majlisi reports that Husain's young daughter Sakina, held captive at Yazid's court after the battle, has a dream in which she sees the gates of heaven open. She enters Paradise and finds a palace in a garden. Standing

about is a multitude of the heavenly "servants of Paradise." Thereupon one of the attendants approaches:

> The servant then took me by the hand [Majlisi has Sakina report] and led me into the palace. Within were five women whose appearance had been glorified by God and whose forms were radiant with divine light. In their midst was one woman in particular of wondrous appearance: her hair was disheveled; she was dressed in black garments; in her hand was a tunic stained with blood. Whenever she stood up, the other women stood with her; when she sat, so did they.
>
> I said to the servant, "Who are these women whose appearance God has glorified?" He replied, "Sakina, this person here is Eve, mother of humankind; and this is Mary bint 'Imran [the mother of Jesus]; and this is Khadija bint Khuwaylid [the Prophet Muhammad's first wife]; and this is Hagar; and this is Sarah. And this woman here, in whose hand is the bloodstained shirt, who whenever she stands, the others stand with her, and whenever she sits, so do the others: why, this is your grandmother, Fatima the Radiant."
>
> So I drew near and said to her, "Grandmother! By God, my father has been killed; and even though I'm so young, I've been left an orphan." Then she hugged me to her breast and wept bitterly. All the women wept with her and said to her, "Fatima, may God judge between you and Yazid on Judgment Day!"[24]

Majlisi presents Sakina's dream in such a way as to develop both doctrinal and liturgical themes. First, this gathering of preeminent figures from the whole range of sacred history, representing all the Abrahamic faiths—Judaism (Sarah), Christianity (Mary), and Islam (Hagar and Khadija)—heightens the importance of Karbala, lending it a cosmic dimension. All of human history comes to a focus in Husain's death, a death that saved the Islamic community. Every venerable ancestor of the Muslim community, from Eve to Khadija, finds this event worthy of contemplation. Second, the attentiveness and respect displayed by the other figures in this assembly illustrate the honorific title ascribed to Fatima in Qummi's prayer anthology: "Mistress of the women of the worlds."

Finally, Sakina's dream may be said to offer us a glimpse of a Shia women's Muharram *majlis* as imagined by a seventeenth-century mullah: a gathering characterized by hierarchy and deference among the celebrants, a gathering where appropriate modes of deportment, dress, and ritual wailing are clearly indicated. The behavior shown forth in Sakina's vision

can be described as prescriptive, exemplary: these holy women in their gathering model the correct way of holding a *majlis*.

Sakina's dream is one example of mythic narratives from the Shia tradition that in story form convey the importance of women's roles in Muharram liturgies. The following legend is from Kashifi's *Garden of the Martyrs*:

> They say that two days later [i.e., two days after the slaughter of the Karbala martyrs] Umar Sa'd's army departed, taking away the severed heads of the martyrs, abandoning their headless corpses in the desert of Karbala. News of this reached the people of Ghadiriyya and they came and beheld the headless corpses lying there.
>
> Then they heard the sound of lamentation and mourning, but they could see no one. This was a gathering of the jinn, who performed lamentation verses [literally, "did *naubas*"] and recited poems as a form of elegy for them [Persian: *nauha mi-kardand wa-qasa'id dar marthiyya-ye ishan mi-khwandand*]. Among these poems is the following verse [given in Arabic in Kashifi's text]:
>
> The women of the jinn help the women of the Hashemites,
> the daughters of the Chosen One,
> Muhammad, foremost of all created beings.
>
> That is [here Kashifi offers a Persian paraphrase], the women of the fairies [or peris] have engaged in funeral laments and weeping [Persian: *matam wa-nauha-gari*] in solidarity with the women of the Hashemites.[25]

The wording chosen by Kashifi to describe the genies' mourning corresponds precisely to the specifically liturgical vocabulary of the Muharram *majlis*: *qasa'id dar marthiyya, matam wa-nauha-gari*. Note, too, the paradigmatic quality of this myth: if the female jinn and invisible peris of the spirit world mourned Husain through the recitation of poetry, so, too, should the women of the human race.

SHAHRBANU AND THE UNION OF THE "TWO TREASURES"

Shahrbanu is cited far less frequently in Shia devotional literature than the other women discussed above. Yet she plays an important role in sacred history, for through her arose what may be termed a "persianizing" of the

line of the Imams. Daughter of Yazdigird III (who was the last of the pre-Islamic Sassanid shahs of Iran), she is said in Kulayni's tenth-century account to have been captured by the Islamic armies and brought to Medina at the time of Persia's conquest by the Arabs. The first Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, rescued her from abuse at the hands of the caliph Umar and kept her from being sold into slavery, arranging instead for the captive princess to be married to his son Husain.[26]

Shahrbanu's acquiescence in this marriage to a member of an enemy people is explained by Majlisi on the basis of a series of miraculous visions. Majlisi ascribes to her the following speech:

> Before the Muslim army arrived, I dreamed that Muhammad, God's messenger, entered our house and sat with Husain and proposed to me on Husain's behalf and married me to him. When morning came this matter stirred my heart and I could think of nothing else. The next night I saw Fatima, Muhammad's daughter, who came to me and introduced me to Islam. So I became Muslim, and then she said: "Victory will go to the Muslims, and soon you will come unhurt to my son Husain. No one will harm you."[27]

Again, as in the story of Karbala, Shia piety imagines Fatima al-Zahra' to be spiritually present and actively involved in human affairs long after her death.

According to Shia tradition, Shahrbanu and Husain ibn Ali were the parents of the fourth Imam, Ali Zayn al-Abidin. Kulayni states that one of Zayn al-Abidin's honorific titles was *Ibn al-Khayratayn*, "Son of the Two Treasures," and Kulayni goes on to explain: "For God's treasure among the Arabs is the Hashemite clan [the family of the Prophet Muhammad and his descendants], and from among the non-Arabs, the people of Persia."[28] Ithna-'Ashari or "Twelver" Shias (adherents of the majoritarian form of Shiism, prevalent in Iran) believe that all the Imams beginning with Zayn al-Abidin are descended from Shahrbanu and Husain. Their union constituted a linking of the ancient Iranian monarchy with the Arab household of the Prophet.

It should be noted, however, that the historicity of the above account is very much open to question. The scholar Yann Richard describes Shahrbanu's marriage as a "pious legend," adding this comment: "Iranian traditions have profitably tapped this rich vein that establishes such a strong link between the humiliated family of the Imams and a nation that was swift to embrace Islam. There is no source that can truly confirm or deny this story, which gives rise to reservations on the part of modern revolutionary Islam-

ists: having fought against the old regime, they reject this aristocratic harnessing of Shi'ism and the old connivance between the imperial system and a certain type of religion."[29] That is to say, latter-day opponents of Reza Shah Pahlevi are suspicious of any tale that lends religious legitimacy to the newly-toppled Iranian monarchy.

But the dubious historicity surrounding Shahrbanu has not prevented her from having a role in the events of Karbala. Shaykh al-Mufid, the tenth-century biographer of the Imams, mentions Shahrbanu in passing, stating that she was the mother of Zayn al-Abidin; but he says nothing about her having accompanied Husain from Arabia on his last fateful journey.[30] Nevertheless, Shia legend imagines her as present at the battle. In an Iranian "passion play" noted by Michael Fischer, Shahrbanu is described as evading capture by Yazid's army. Husain's horse, Dhu al-Janah ("the Winged One," known in Urdu sources as Zuljenah), spirits her away from Karbala and brings her safely to Iran, to the city of Rey.[31] Henry Corbin notes the existence of a present-day "sanctuary of Shahrbanu" near Rey in the hill country south of Teheran; Fischer remarks that access to this shrine is reserved for women only.[32]

ZAYNAB AND UMM KULTHUM: PORTRAITS OF RESISTANCE

Zaynab bint Ali and Umm Kulthum—both sisters of the Imam Husain—were present at Karbala and survived the battle, thereafter being led as captives to Yazid's court in Damascus. Majlisi depicts both sisters as outspoken in confronting their oppressors. Immediately after the battle, Yazid's soldiers had taken the surviving members of Husain's family to the Umayyad garrison of Kufa before the journey to Damascus. As the camel-borne captives were paraded through the streets of Kufa, crowds gathered and many individuals tried to offer bread and dates to the children among the prisoners. This sympathetic gesture was prompted in all probability by shame as well as pity. The Kufans, after first inviting Husain to leave Arabia and lead them in rebellion, had failed to revolt against Yazid or join Husain at Karbala. The Umayyad governor of Kufa, Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad, had been ferocious in crushing every incipient attempt at insurgency.

Umm Kulthum responded angrily to the Kufans' shame-faced attempts at generosity. She cried out that these people had no right to offer charity to the survivors; and then, Majlisi tells us, "she snatched it [the bread

and dates] from the hands and very mouths of the children and threw it to the ground. And all this happened while the crowds were weeping and wailing."[33]

Once they had arrived in Damascus, the women were assembled before Yazid in his court. There, Qasim's widow, Fatima Kubra, the beautiful young bride of Karbala, excited the lust of a "red-haired Syrian" from among the caliph's entourage. Loudly the Syrian demanded that she be given to him as a gift. The young woman is described as shrinking back with fear, but Umm Kulthum blasted the man with scorn: "Shut up, most depraved of men. May God cut out your tongue! . . . The children of the prophets aren't meant to be the slaves of the children of bastards and pretenders."[34]

Yet in the devotional literature and lamentation hymns, citations of Umm Kulthum are relatively few compared with the numerous references to her much more celebrated sister Zaynab. From a functional perspective Umm Kulthum duplicates Zaynab's role as a symbol of defiance in defeat; the role and its attendant actions tend to be focused in the person of Zaynab.

A good example of this tendency at work is a recent popular-format biography of Zaynab by M. H. Bilgrami. Here the Fatima Kubra-Syrian episode includes no reference to Umm Kulthum. Zaynab is the person who speaks out in defense of the young widow, and when she curses the Syrian, he drops dead. Bilgrami also assigns to Zaynab a six-page speech of defiance against Yazid.[35]

Zaynab's prominence is also due to the fact that Shia piety credits her with being the first to hold a *majlis* or lamentation assembly to mourn Husain. This she did while still a prisoner in Damascus. Even more important is her rescue of Ali Zayn al-Abidin, the only son of Husain to survive Karbala.

Too ill to take part in the fighting, Zayn al-Abidin had lain helplessly in his tent throughout the battle. Thereafter he was brought along with the other prisoners to Kufa, where the governor Ibn Ziyad ordered him to be put to death. No sooner was this command uttered, we learn from Majlisi, than Zaynab rushed to her nephew's side and clasped him in a protective embrace. "By God, I won't let go of him," she exclaimed. "If you're going to kill him, you'll have to kill me along with him." Her action ensured not only Zayn al-Abidin's safety but also the survival of the line of the Imams in human history.[36]

Male helplessness among the survivors of Karbala led to role reversals and unexpected inversions of traditional gender-linked behavior. This in turn has generated a certain tension surrounding the figure of Zaynab in recent Shia devotional and political writings that evaluate her actions of defiance. I discuss this in more detail below.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WOMEN OF KARBALA IN NAUHA LAMENTATION-POETRY

For centuries one of the most popular forms of Shia devotional literature has been the *nauha*, or lamentation dirge. The *nauha* is brief in length, typically comprising no more than a dozen verses; it takes as its subject matter the martyrs' sufferings at Karbala. My first example of this genre is taken from the works of Mir Babar Ali Anis, the celebrated Urdu poet who died in 1874 at Lucknow. The opening verse of this particular *nauha* refers to the *Chahalom* (which I translate with the phrase "fortieth-day lamentation ceremony"). Universally in Islamic societies the term designates prayer services held forty days after a person's death; but in Shia Islam it also refers to the liturgy of mourning held in honor of Husain forty days after Ashura. The *Chahalom* marks the close of the annual lamentation season. I translate as follows the poem's first five verses:

> Today is the fortieth-day lamentation ceremony, at the burial site
> of the exalted lord;
> Bareheaded is the Prophet, upon him be peace.
>
> The people of the Household have been released from prison and
> have come to the battlefield
> to lift up the corpse of the grandson of the Prophet of all humankind.
>
> They are ready for the burial of the pure martyrs;
> the graves are ready for each of the renowned ones.
>
> The servant Fidda cried out, "O Lady, come and take part;
> Sajjad [a title of Ali Zayn al-Abidin] is burying the Imam's corpse."
>
> "Would that you could bury me, too, beside my brother!":
> these were the words uttered by the joyless Zaynab.[37]

In this poem Anis describes the return of the survivors to Karbala after their release from imprisonment in Damascus. Zayn al-Abidin and the women of Husain's household are depicted as undertaking the interment of the unburied corpses (this portrayal conflicts with the account in Tabari's history, which credits the sympathetic inhabitants of Ghadiriyya with burying the martyrs the day after Ashura; but Anis's burial scene carries more emotional charge than Tabari's).[38] There is a stillness to the scene as

visualized by Anis, a quality akin to the *depositio* tableaux in Christian representations of the Crucifixion and Mary's contemplation of the body of Jesus. Such verses illustrate a recurrent characteristic of the *nauha* genre: it is lyric rather than narrative in emphasis, preferring the evocation of intense emotion to the presentation of sequential actions.

But we should bear in mind that this evocation of emotion is not intended simply as an aesthetic experience. The *nauha* comprises functional religious art, which is meant to arouse an expression of pity and compassion in its audience in the form of weeping and exclamations of grief. The *nauha* is intended primarily to be experienced collectively, most typically in the setting of a Muharram gathering, rather than in the solitary act of private reading. Weeping out of sympathy with the Karbala martyrs earns one the benefit of intercession in the afterlife, a doctrine reflected in the following passage from an Iranian "passion play," where the Prophet Muhammad hands to his grandson Husain the keys of Paradise: "Go thou and deliver from the flames every one who has in his life-time shed but a single tear for thee, every one who has in any way helped thee, every one who has performed a pilgrimage to thy shrine, or mourned for thee, and every one who has written tragic verse for thee. Bear each and all with thee to Paradise."[39]

According to Shia informants whom I interviewed in the city of Hyderabad, any *nauha* reciter or *majlis* preacher who stimulates tears in his audience himself earns *thawab* (Urdu: *savab*) or religious merit.

Given the purpose of *nauha* poetry as described above, it is not surprising that this genre favors the depiction of closely-rendered pathetic details from Karbala. This can easily be illustrated from the work of Anis, as in the following verses from his *nauha* about Fatima Kubra and her battlefield wedding to Qasim:

> Kubra kept saying, O my envy of the moon, O bridegroom!
> Your body is trampled underfoot by the horses, O fair one, O bridegroom! . . .
>
> Few marriages in the world will have been like this:
> at the hour of dawn he left his bride and went off to die, O bridegroom!
> . . .
>
> Your hands and feet have become reddened not with henna but with blood.
> In place of a tasseled crest, your head bears a wound, O bridegroom! . . .

When anyone asks me, "Tell us, whose grave is this?,"
I will say in tears, "It's my grave; this is my broken heart." O bridegroom!

I have become a widow, a bride of one night only, with heart enflamed, in misery.
On the battlefield, at dawn, he fell beneath swordstroke and axe. O bridegroom!

Having given a sign with your sleeve, thus you went from the world.
Never again did news of you come to your bride, O bridegroom![40]

As is typical of the *nauha* genre, in this poem Anis selects a single moment from the Karbala drama—in this instance Fatima Kubra's response to her husband's death—and then explores it for its emotional potential. Anis here employs a favorite technique, having one of the women of Karbala function as speaker and visualizing the episode from her perspective. This heightens the effect of immediacy and pathetic intensity.

Note, too, the densely allusive quality of his verse: "Having given a sign with your sleeve, thus you went from the world." Anis takes for granted a close familiarity with the Karbala narrative on the part of his audience. This brief reference to Qasim's sleeve is apparently enough to awaken the audience's memory of the farewell scene between Fatima and Qasim as presented by Kashifi, recounted above: the bride asks for a token whereby she might recognize her husband among the thronging souls on Judgment Day, and Qasim tears his sleeve in reply.

In his other *nauhas* Anis frequently uses the figure of Zaynab as speaker. In such poems the moment of defeat constitutes the dramatic focus:

The killer mounted on horseback rides against the breast of the prophet's grandson.
From the tent Zaynab cries out, "Halt, accursed one! My brother's breast is afflicted with wounds."[41]

The following *nauha* visualizes the enemy soldiers' triumph as they prepare to mutilate the martyrs' corpses:

Zaynab cried out, "Do not cut off the head of the Prophet's grandson!
Shimr, fear God; what shamelessness is this?"[42]

With all her male kinfolk dead or too incapacitated to fight, Zaynab in these poems becomes spokesperson and defender of the Prophet's household. But Anis pairs her defiance with a bitter acknowledgment of helplessness, as in the following poem where she addresses her brother's lifeless body:

> How will I lift up your corpse?
> My head lacks any veil which I might spread out for you.
> Dust of the wasteland covers your body.
> Alas, beloved son of Fatima, O Husain![43]

Zaynab's loss of her veil in defeat becomes a symbol for all the shame endured by *Ahl-e Bayt* at the hands of Yazid's soldiers. Note how the veil motif recurs in the following poem:

> Your corpse did not even receive a shroud, O my brother, alas!
> Nor does my head have a veil to cover it. What shall I do, O Husain?[44]

These verses reflect Anis's taste for verbal play and parallelisms. Zaynab in her humiliation lacks a veil for her head; Husain in his death lacks a shroud for his corpse. The brother and sister are separated by her inability to bury him properly, but they are united by the shame and suffering they must both endure.

Defiance and helplessness together characterize Zaynab in these *nauhas*. One might speculate that this combination of traits has proven to be very much to the taste of the poems' audiences: for the Shia community has defined itself over time as an embattled minority that has survived even when persecuted and victimized, as a group that looks beyond present-day suffering to vindication in the afterlife. Proud even in defeat, defiant even in weakness, Zaynab might be said to figure so prominently in Shia devotional literature precisely because the community sees itself reflected in her experience.

The *nauha* continues to play an important role in Shia liturgies today. It is very much a thriving genre. In Hyderabad I discovered that there exist several dozen *matami guruhan* (guilds that sponsor Muharram liturgies) in the city's Shia neighborhoods, and that most of these guilds have poets who compose fresh *nauhas* annually for performance in *majlis* settings and public processions. These hymns are meant to be performed together with the action of *matam*, a term that has been mentioned in preceding chapters but that warrants further discussion here.

Matam in its most general sense is an Arabic term denoting acts of lamentation for the dead. In Shia Islam it refers to gestures of mourning for the Karbala martyrs, most typically in the form of repetitive and forceful breast-beating. The thudding sound of *matam*, as a group of participants slap themselves in unison, constitutes a percussive accompaniment to the chanted *nauha*: the human chest becomes a musical instrument.

To appreciate the *nauha* genre fully one must be aware of its performance context. All those present—old and young, women as well as men—participate in the action of *matam*. Rhythm, as one might imagine, thus becomes an important dimension of *nauha* composition; and poets whom I interviewed in Hyderabad told me that they keep in mind the demands of vocal recitation and public performance as they create their *nauhas*.[45] Consider the following poem, a *nauha* written for a Hyderabadi guild called Guruh-e Ja'fari:

All those in prison wail and lament:
the innocent one has departed this world; weep, yes, weep in grief.

Sakina, Sakina!, her mother keeps saying,
slapping herself in sorrow; weep, yes, weep in grief.

In their midst, the corpse of the sinless one, alas!
And all about there has risen up the sound of crying;
weep, yes, weep in grief.

For the sake of this four-year-old girl,
all those in the women's quarters beat their breasts;
weep, yes, weep in grief.

Her cheeks still appear red, but alas!,
it is the red of blood spilled in slaughter;
weep, yes, weep in grief.

O what outrage: that there is still visible on the girl's neck
the mark of the rope; weep, yes, weep in grief.

Her hands still cover her ears, alas!
The blood has dried on her shoulders; weep, yes, weep in grief.

What tyrant's oppression, what violence, did she endure

at such a young age, and she so innocent?
Weep, yes, weep in grief.

She was only four years of age, alas!
She was imprisoned, and she departed this life;
weep, yes, weep in grief.

For how long could this child's spirit, at such a young age,
endure affliction and tragedy?
Weep, yes, weep in grief.[46]

Repetition and simplicity of phrasing characterize this *nauha*, traits that are typical of the poems I collected in Hyderabad and Lahore. The topic here is the death of Husain's daughter Sakina while imprisoned in Damascus. As in the nineteenth-century poetry of Anis, today's *nauhas* focus on single moments from the Karbala drama and then elaborate these with grief-stirring details ("O what outrage: that there is still visible on the girl's neck the mark of the rope").

Of all the children said to have been present and suffered at Karbala, Sakina is one of the most frequently cited in the recently authored *nauhas* I have examined. Just as Zaynab symbolizes defiance and resistance in defeat, and Fatima al-Zahra' passive endurance throughout eternity, Sakina becomes emblematic of all the sufferings visited on *Ahl-e Bayt*. Her youth and innocence make her perfect for this role, ensuring an indignant response on the congregation's part as they hear the catalogue of what she underwent: thirst during the siege; slaps and scourgings by Yazid's men; a frantic search among the battlefield corpses for her dead father.

The *nauhas* conjure forth excruciating close-up views of all these sorrows; and so familiar with Sakina's agonies is the audience assumed to be that the poet can indulge in oblique allusion in describing her torments. For example, the verse cited above, "Her hands still cover her ears, alas! The blood has dried on her shoulders," alludes to one of the well-known indignities undergone by Sakina in captivity. The enemy soldiers stripped her of her jewelry, tearing the rings from her ears so that her earlobes spouted blood.

It is hard to overstate how closely bound up Sakina's name is with the notion of innocent suffering. In Muharram *majlis* sermons I attended in India, when the preacher reached the *masa'ib* portion of his talk (where the agonies of the martyrs are enumerated and enlarged upon), it was sufficient for the speaker merely to begin to refer to Husain's daughter ("And then we come

to Sakina . . ."—a phrase followed by a sighing pause on the preacher's part) and at once the congregation would burst into moans.

The Sakina poem cited above contains a reference to the act of *matam*: "All those in the women's quarters beat their breasts." This action could be considered paradigmatic: pious women of the seventh century model behavior we should imitate today. A different kind of *matam*-reference appears in the following two poems. The first is from the *nauha* chapbook published by a Hyderabadi guild called the Anjuman-e Ma'sumeen (the Association of the Immaculate Ones):

> All of life is a remembrance of Karbala,
> the Imam's victory, weeping, and tears.
> Morning and night, let there be on our lips this very cry:
> Hail, beloved Husain, O beloved Husain.
>
> Husain's mother prays
> that this same cry should always echo forth
> from the dust of the earth to the very vault of heaven:
> Hail, beloved Husain, O beloved Husain.
>
> Farid, may there always be *matam* for Husain;
> let there be no sorrow save sorrow for Husain.
> Until the Day of Resurrection, let there remain only this season and no other:
> Hail, beloved Husain, O beloved Husain.[47]

This poem can be compared with the verses (cited in a previous chapter) composed by Ali Javid Maqsud and published in the hymnbook of the Association of the Moths of Husain:

> Even if streaks of blood now flow from our breasts,
> may our hands never cease:
> Let this *matam* continue on behalf of the one who was wronged,
> for as long as Fatima's cry comes forth.[48]

In both poems there surfaces the traditional image of Fatima al-Zahra' as eternal mourner. What is remarkable here is how the image is deployed: Husain's mother asks today's Shia congregants to undertake *matam* in honor of her son. Noteworthy, too, are the repeated self-references contained in these verses: "Even if streaks of blood now flow from our breasts, may our

hands never cease: let this *matam* continue." In such verses the poet highlights the congregation and celebrants. The emphasis here is not simply the martyrs' sufferings at Karbala or the evocation of the past but rather the commemoration of Karbala in the present. The focus in these stanzas is on the Shia guild, its practice of *matam*, and the pride taken by the guild in joining its lamentation to Fatima's. Thereby the seventh century and the present are bridged: the blood of Karbala appears on our own breasts. The shifting time frames in such poems—a characteristic feature, I would argue, of many Urdu *nauhas* published today—comprise another means to involve the congregation emotionally as it listens to these poems. For the congregation is caught up along with the chanter in breast-beating as each verse is recited; and the participants hear themselves described as engaging in a collective action for a collective purpose. Thus today's lamentation poems, by linking sacred history from the past with the commemoration of that history in the present, can be said to build Shia communal identity.

Finally, note the verse that concludes the first of the two poems just quoted above: "Farid, may there always be *matam* for Husain." This is an example of the use of the *takhallos*: the poet addresses himself and inserts his own name into the closing stanza of the poem, a signature device familiar from classical Persian poetry. Here the poet employs the *takhallos* to include himself in the ranks of today's Shia mourners.

The bridging of past and present occurs in yet another Hyderabadi chant, this one published in the chapbook of a guild called the Guruh-e 'Azadaran-e Husaini (the Group of Husain's Mourners):

> This is the sign that comes to us from Husain's example:
> for those who are courageous and spirited,
> an honorable death is to be welcomed . . .
> From all people everywhere, again and again,
> have we heard the cry of "Ya Husain!"
> All people, in their own proper place and time,
> have cried out this very cry.[49]

In surveying modern-day devotional poetry linked to the "women of Karbala," I have noticed that reference is frequently made to Husain's sister Zaynab. Two *nauhas* in recently published *matam* chapbooks, one from Hyderabad, the other from Lahore, offer portraits of Zaynab that link her with Qur'anic scripture. My first excerpt is from a poem entitled *Islam ko shu'lon se bacha le ga'i Zaynab* ("Zaynab made Islam safe from the flames"). The setting is the aftermath of Ashura, when the victorious soldiers of the enemy

have set fire to the tents of Husain's camp. "The infant lacking milk" referred to in the first verse is Ali Asghar, the young son of Husain; Abbas is the brother and bodyguard of the Imam. Both were killed at Karbala:

> The banner of Abbas, the cradle of the infant lacking milk,
> all the wealth remaining of the majesty of Islam:
> Zaynab rescued these from the flaming tent.
> Zaynab made Islam safe from the flames . . .
>
> Farid, even today this sorrow is the responsibility entrusted to Zaynab,
> she who endured every injury and outrage after the martyrdom.
> Zaynab safeguarded the goal and aspirations of Husain;
> Zaynab made Islam safe from the flames.[50]

"The responsibility entrusted to Zaynab" is my translation of the phrase *Zaynab ki amanat*. The term *amanat* (Arabic: *amanah*) occurs very seldom in the Qur'an, but it does appear in one celebrated scriptural passage, 33.72: "We offered the trust/responsibility to the heavens and the earth." This passage is of vital importance in both Sufi and Shia exegesis. Mahmoud Ayoub summarizes Shia interpretations of this Qur'anic term: "The Shi'i community, in renewing every year the memory of the martyred Imam and his family and friends, renews its own covenant with the imams, a covenant which is identified with the primordial trust (*amanah*) that God offered to all of creation, but which only man accepted. This *amanah* . . . is interpreted by the Shi'i community to be the imamate of the twelve imams. The *amanah*, or divine charge, is the imams themselves and their *walayah*, which here means both their nearness to God as His friends (*awliya'*) and also their authority (*walayah*) over men."[51]

In the modern-day *nauha* quoted above, the Hyderabadi poet applies the term *amanat* to the burden of responsibility and endurance assumed by Zaynab after the death of the Imam Husain.

My second excerpt, taken from a Pakistani chapbook published in Lahore, reads as follows:

> Husain's prostration in prayer protected the honor of the prophets;
> in prison his sister perfected the religion . . .
>
> O brother, your last prostration in prayer has been completed.
> Now your sister has yielded up her veil as alms.

This crowded bazaar of Syria has grown worse than the place where you were slain.
The shame of public exposure has killed me even before my death.[52]

The verse "in prison his sister perfected the religion" (*kar diya din ko mukammal qayd mayn hamshir ne*) harbors an echo of Qur'an 5.3: "Today I have perfected your religion" (*al-yawm akmaltu lakum dinakum*). Badshah Husain, in his Shia commentary on the Qur'an, states that this passage was revealed on the occasion of Ghadir Khumm, when the Prophet Muhammad publicly proclaimed Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor. "Before this general proclamation of Our Lord's Imamate," asserts the commentator, "Islam was neither perfect as a religion, nor was God wholly pleased with it."[53]

The implication of our *nauha's* Qur'anic allusion, then, would seem to be the following. Upon Muhammad's death his cousin Ali succeeded him as religious leader of the Islamic community. Upon Husain's death his sister Zaynab succeeded him, if not as religious leader, at least as Imamic regent, protecting the life of the fourth Imam Zayn al-Abidin during the spiritual interregnum until Zayn al-Abidin's health was restored and he could assume his hereditary leadership role as Imam.

Both of the Qur'anic passages cited above, 33.72 and 5.3, are understood by Shia exegetes to refer to the Imams. Yet in these poems the *nauha* composers apply the scriptural verses to Zaynab, as if to acknowledge that for a time a woman safeguarded the line of the Imams until traditional patriarchal authority could be reimposed.

ON THE VOLATILITY OF SYMBOLS: ZAYNAB AND THE 1979 IRANIAN REVOLUTION

In this chapter I have noted certain recurrent features in the portraits of Shia holy women as they appear in the devotional literature. Fatima al-Zahra' is associated with passive endurance and eternal mourning; Zaynab, with defiance in defeat; Sakina and Fatima Kubra, with vulnerability and suffering visualized in pathetic detail.

Yet it should not be assumed that these portraits remain necessarily invariant over time. They may be subject to change, in tandem with the changing social roles of the women who listen to the stories and recite the Karbala poems as they perform *matam* during the annual Muharram liturgy. In an essay entitled "Sexuality and Shi'i Social Protest in Iran," Nahid

Yeganeh and Nikki Keddie have argued that "historically, Shi'i ideology on women's position has varied contextually . . . Shi'i protest at one time and place became the status quo in another time and place."[54]

It stands to reason that during times of rapid social change, models of ideal behavior would be represented differently to reflect changes in Shia ideology. Such has been the case in Iranian society over the last thirty years. Marcia Hermansen's study of the Sorbonne-trained Iranian sociologist Ali Shari'ati (d. 1977) discusses how Shari'ati criticized the passivity traditionally associated with Fatima al-Zahra'. Furthermore Shari'ati attempted to reinterpret the doctrine of *shafa'ah* (also transliterated *shifa'at*: "intercession for the forgiveness of sins"), arguing that this concept tempted Shias into social irresponsibility and moral inertness. The influence of French existentialist philosophy is apparent in his presentation of the Prophet's daughter: "Fatimeh had to become Fatimeh on her own; being the daughter of Muhammad would not do it for her . . . Fatimeh through the *shifa'at* of Muhammad became Fatimeh, for *shifa'at* in Islam is the cause of acquiring 'being worthy of salvation,' not a means for 'the salvation of the unworthy.' It is the individual who must seize *shifa'at* from the intercessor and through it change his [or her] own destiny . . . He must seize it; *Shafi'* [the intercessor] does not bestow it [automatically] on the individual."[55]

Anne Betteridge has examined how female figures from Shia sacred history were mobilized to encourage opposition to Reza Shah Pahlevi during the Iranian Revolution of the late 1970s. Although Fatima al-Zahra' was acknowledged as the appropriate model in times of peace, her daughter Zaynab was put forward, in the period of crisis during the Ayatollah Khomeini's struggle with the Shah, as "a role model for inspiring political opposition among women."[56] Zaynab's assertiveness and defiance were praised as behavior appropriate for imitation by women in the political and social realms. Meanwhile the Iranian clergy, interpreting contemporary events in the light of Karbala, denounced the Shah as a second Yazid.

The presentation proved successful. Writing shortly after the victory of the 1979 revolution, Farah Azari, one of the founding members of the Iranian Women's Solidarity Group, stated: "For a time it was Zeinab who came to the forefront to symbolise the ideal of the modern revolutionary Muslim woman in Iran. Those enigmatic young women clad in a black chador . . . bearing machine guns, aspire to follow Zeinab. It is not inappropriate that they have been sometimes referred to as 'the commandos of her holiness Zeinab' (*Komando-haye Hazrat-e Zeinab*) . . . What has happened is that the continuing revolutionary climate of Iran demanded a more active

role of its female population than could have been provided by the previous passive ideal of Fatima."[57]

For the patriarchally oriented Iranian clergy, however, the challenge has been how to domesticate and channel this newly vitalized women's ideology now that the Shah is gone and the theocracy is firmly in place. According to Guity Nashat, the Islamic Republic has made use of "an extensive campaign in the press" to avoid losing control over the icons of the women's movement. Zaynab is saluted as an appropriate role model in times of revolution; "but since the rule of justice has been restored, women must resume the role required of them by their Muslim duty. The model they are urged to emulate for normal (nonrevolutionary) times is that of Fatimeh."[58]

Zaynab in recent years seems to have emerged as that figure from sacred history who offers the greatest challenge to traditionally-minded Shias. One solution to her challenge has been to label Zaynab's behavior, precisely because of her assertiveness and high visibility, as atypical and non-normative, as an index of the disturbed conditions of Islamic society in her lifetime. M. H. Bilgrami makes this argument in the introduction to a recent devotional biography of Zaynab entitled *The Victory of Truth:*

> According to the *shari'ah* (revealed law) of Allah women are hidden treasures, neither to be displayed nor advertised. Theirs is a subtle, fundamental and discreet domain . . . But this rule can only apply if all the other elements of a pure Muslim society are equal. If the application of the divinely directed formula is chaotic and imbalanced, then that is the time when a woman feels compelled to emerge into the open arena. This is the situation in which Zaynab (a.s.) found herself.[59]

CONCLUDING NOTE: MYTH AND HISTORICITY IN THE SHIA TRADITION

At various points in discussing the women of the household of the Imams I have acknowledged discrepancies between the historical record and the devotional literature with regard to questions such as the wedding of Fatima Kubra, the burial of the martyrs, and the status of Husain's legendary wife Shahrbanu. I have not emphasized these discrepancies because I believe that in understanding Shia piety, what is important is not determining the historicity of events so much as glimpsing the vision, the worldview, that is communally experienced and shared and perceived as true.

Recorded in the narratives of the women of Karbala is a collective experience, of expropriation and persecution, of survival as a minority community. In this sense the Karbala story can be described as myth: a story that makes sense of shared historical experience, that tells a people who they are, that defines them by insisting on the necessity and inevitability of the suffering they have collectively had to undergo.

The Karbala myth also mirrors a worldview that is at base idealistic and tragic: idealistic, because it postulates an unrealized order worth dedicating one's life to; tragic, because humans unaided cannot and will never attain this order. The world as it is constituted is flawed, the flaw resulting from human disobedience to God and the evil we choose to commit in our exercise of divinely granted free will. At Karbala Yazid's soldiers chose to violate the religio-political order intended by God when they killed Husain and subjected the women of his household to humiliation and imprisonment.

The Karbala tragedy is the consummate expression of this fault line, of human freedom to disobey God's will. For as long as the flaw remains, the tragedy will repeat itself across time. As we have seen in glancing at the influence of the Iranian Revolution, new historical circumstances and social pressures will cause modulations in the presentation of the mythic figures linked to Karbala. But for as long as the tragic vision endures, these stories will continue to be told.

FIVE

Shia Ritual in a Sunni Setting: Muharram Observances in the Hill Station of Darjeeling, West Bengal

INTRODUCTION: VIEWS FROM THE TEA PLANTERS' CLUB

The Bagdogra-Darjeeling road begins in hot steamy flatland, flanked by bamboo thickets and banana fronds; but soon it rises and corkscrews among the hills. The vegetation changes: silver fir, rhododendron, maple, oak. From the window of my hired van I saw tea plantations with weathered placards bearing names like Longview and Margaret's Hope. Women with baskets plucked tea shrubs and called to each other.

The air grew cooler, moister. Mist gathered and the sky darkened. Drops of rain spattered the windshield.

"Monsoon," apologized my driver.

"No problem," I said happily. I rolled down the window, breathed deeply, sank back in the seat.

By the time I reached Darjeeling in the late afternoon, rain was drumming down and I was chilled enough to put on a sweater and jacket; but I wasn't complaining.

Two days earlier I'd been in Hyderabad, sweating in a first-aid tent, bandaging wounded flagellants. (Shia community leaders had invited me to serve as a volunteer paramedic at the Hazrat Abbas shrine.) This had been my second Muharram season in India, and it had tired me out: crowds and noise, nonstop heat, relentless sun. I wanted a change, wanted a week's escape from Hyderabad. No more lamentation rituals for a while, no more

ethnographic observations and note-taking. No more flails and blades, no more blood.

I had studied a map of India. Darjeeling: the name caught my fancy. Tea country. An old outpost of the British Raj. Himalayan foothills, high altitude: 7,100 feet. I visualized quiet mountain paths, solitude, nothing to document or analyze. It took me little time to decide. Quickly I'd booked a flight to Calcutta and from there to Bagdogra, the airstrip nearest my destination.

And I even had the name of a good hotel: the Windamere. An Indian colleague had picked it for me. "You are a romantic and backward-looking sort," he said dryly. "Keen on swanning about among ruins of empire. And the Windamere is an old prewar throwback, just the place for those who like their nostalgia laid on nice and proper." Condescension notwithstanding, my colleague's choice proved a good one.

Early darkness, rolling monsoon clouds, lashing rain. The van sloshed through the rutted streets of Darjeeling's lower town, climbed a hill past a very English-looking clock tower, stopped at the base of a steep footpath. My driver pointed to the lights glittering in the wet atop the path. "Windamere."

The concierge helped me out of my coat and then glanced at the wall clock. "You're just in time for tea, sir." Late-afternoon tea: this was the first of many pleasant routines I encountered at the Windamere. A uniformed maid showed me into a sitting room. No sooner had I settled myself than I was offered scones, ginger snaps, and tea served in a thin china cup. The room was furnished comfortably with old sofas and bookcases filled with novels and travel literature. A fire crackling in the hearth near my feet nicely counterpointed the rain outside.

Before dinner I borrowed an umbrella and wandered the hotel grounds. A brochure in the lobby informed me that in the nineteenth century this had been a "boarding house for bachelor English tea planters." As I walked about I saw that the Windamere consisted of some seven or eight cottages grouped around the dining hall and perched near the summit of Observatory Hill. When the sky cleared, the concierge said, I'd be able to see Kanchenjunga and other peaks of the Sikkimese Himalayas; but for now fog and twilight shut us in.

I woke early the next morning to chanting and the muffled ringing of bells. I looked out the window. Through the mist marched a long line of figures cloaked against the cold, following a path that skirted the Windamere and continued up Observatory Hill. I dressed and followed them until I reached Mahakal, a site sacred to Buddhists and Hindus alike. In centuries

past a monastery once stood here, Dorje-Ling, "the place of the thunderbolt," from which Darjeeling takes its name.

The ambience here was eclectic. In one shrine a Brahmin priest and a Tibetan monk sat facing each other chanting prayers. In another pilgrims gathered before a statue of the goddess Kali trampling underfoot her consort Shiva, while overhead fluttered prayer flags stamped with images of the Buddhist wind horse of the high mountain passes.

This Mahakal shrine shaped one of my first impressions of Darjeeling: a place where religions mix easily. This was what I'd wanted: something pleasing, relaxed, a low-key Shangri-La of beatific mountain piety. Later of course I had to modify this first impression; but for the moment I found it soothing.

After breakfast I wandered down the hill to the Chowrasta, a plaza closed to motor traffic that serves as the main public square of upper Darjeeling. Here are clustered bookstores, fabric stalls, and some of the finest curio shops to be found anywhere in India. Such places would have appealed, I think, to Talbot Mundy, the English adventure writer of the 1920s and author of *King of the Khyber Rifles*, who in one of his stories describes the discovery of a mystical "black-granite sphere in the crypt of a ruined temple near Darjiling."[1]

A visitor might well expect to uncover Mundy's treasure in one of the Chowrasta's storefronts, for their shelves are crammed with curiosities. Prayer wheels and Hindu bronzes. Chinese porcelain and *thangka* scroll-hangings. Polished stones and silver skulls mounted as pendant jewelry. Not to mention old Tibetan currency notes fancifully engraved with crimson snow lions. Step through the door of any of the Chowrasta's shops, and you see the evidence of Darjeeling's traditional role as a frontier town and trade center for the kingdoms of Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan.

Out on the Chowrasta I saw that Darjeeling still draws visitors from all over the subcontinent and beyond. I lingered, purposeless, glad to have no research agenda, and sat on a plaza bench as the locals do to watch the passing parade: Bengali tourists from the plains, bundled in sweaters and woolen scarves against the highland chill; entrepreneurs leading diminutive ponies about and offering ten-minute rides to vacationers and their children; European backpackers; Lepcha and Nepali hillfolk; monks in burgundy robes.

I studied the technique of what seemed to be a hustling local photographer, at his feet a sack of tinselly costumes, who called out to Indian tourist families. He was offering to dress up their children and take a snapshot of them in "native dress": the girls as "tea pickers," with wicker baskets strapped

to their backs; the boys as "Gurkhas," with crook-bladed kukri knives tucked into their belts. I felt I was glimpsing Darjeeling as seen by middle-class Indian holiday-makers from Calcutta or Delhi: an exotic locale fully as foreign as it would be to any New Yorker or Californian.

Early the next morning I caught another glimpse of local realities; but this one was more jarring. I had hiked out along a path hoping for a clear sky and a view of the mountains. "At dawn," the novelist Rumer Godden once wrote in a description of Darjeeling, "the snows turn pink; the hill people call it 'the flowering of the snows.'"[2] I was in luck: crystalline skies and a Himalayan panorama of distant ice summits touched delicately by sunlight.

Still sleepy but pleased to have had my flowering, I was strolling back to my hotel when I bumbled straight into a squadron of Indian soldiers: heavily armed, I saw, alert and very tense. Single-file they came at a trot. I stepped out of the way as they hurried along the trail I'd just left.

Back at the hotel I sought information.

"What you saw," offered a clerk, "was probably an operation against GNLF agitators."

GNLF: Gurkha National Liberation Front. This was a movement, I learned later, that in the 1980s had demanded recognition of the political rights of the "Gurkhas," a term which in this part of the world has come to mean Indians of Nepali descent. (The name Gurkha was chosen for its high-profile recognition value as a label associated with martial valor.) Originally brought to northeast India to work in the region's tea plantations, ethnic Nepalis now comprise the majority of Darjeeling district's population.

Administratively a part of West Bengal state, Darjeeling is subordinate to Calcutta, and therein lies the problem. The "Gurkhas" consider themselves to be exploited and mistreated by a bureaucratic apparatus run largely by Bengalis. For Darjeeling's Gurkhas, Calcutta and the Bengali plains form a world apart, an alien entity unentitled to rule over them. The GNLF called for independence from West Bengal and separate-state status. In the ensuing guerrilla war, from 1986 to 1988, there were strikes and political murders, mountain roadblocks and disruptions of the tea harvest.[3]

The "Gurkhaland Movement" formally ended in July 1988, with the granting of limited local autonomy and the creation of a "Darjeeling Gurkha Hill Council."[4] But malcontents within the movement, I was told during my 1991 visit, continued to engage in violence as they agitated for full independence from West Bengal. The result: ongoing police patrols of the kind I'd encountered that morning. Moreover—but this was something I learned only much later—the GNLF and the lingering effects of the guerrilla war influenced Darjeeling's public religious processions in ways I discuss below.

The second phase of my education in intrusive local realities came about as a result of my desire to investigate one of the most evident monuments to the district's Raj-era past: the Darjeeling Tea Planters' Club. Founded in 1868 and once a center for much of the town's social life, today the club survives as a hotel, and it's worth spending an hour or two here—even if the place feels lackluster compared with the Windamere's sparkle—just to explore the site. The dining room boasts cupboards filled with regimental silver presented by members of the Northern Bengal Volunteer Rifles.

I sat in the bar-lounge and studied its series of watercolors by one "Snaffles," a British artist popular during the Raj for his illustrations of sporting scenes. The Planters' Club offers a vivid action series focused on pig-sticking. My favorite Snaffles was a painting entitled "The Finest View in Asia": a tusked boar rushing through tall grass, pursued by a lancer on horseback.[5]

As I studied the watercolors a young man who had been idling on the club veranda came over and introduced himself. He was a driver for a tourist agency and was waiting for a guest to come downstairs. He asked what I did for a living. When I explained that I taught university courses on Islam, he looked quietly pleased—"I myself am Muslim," he smiled—but when I added that my research specialty involved Muharram rituals, his expression became much more animated. "You're interested in Muharram? Oh, you should have come here two weeks ago. We've just finished days and days of Muharram processions."

So what I had planned as pure rest and recreation turned into a busman's holiday: I started interviewing people and locating informants willing to talk to me about Muharram in Darjeeling. So promising did the region seem, and so much did I enjoy Darjeeling, meeting local people and drinking the local tea, that I promised myself that I would return one day to do focused work on Muharram in this hill station.

Not until May 1995, however, was I able to fulfill this promise. What I uncovered offered a remarkable contrast to Hyderabad. In Darjeeling the lamentation observance of Muharram, a season that constitutes the focal point of the liturgical calendar for Shia Muslims worldwide, is not organized by Shias at all; nor is lamentation the characteristic activity in these rituals.

In this chapter I will describe how Muharram is celebrated in Darjeeling and how its rituals are prepared and organized. I will give particular attention to the committees that do the preparation and planning for Muharram; and I will summarize the responses I received, from committee planners and ordinary folks alike, when I asked them to explain why

Muharram is celebrated so enthusiastically in a population that is almost entirely non-Shia.

LAMENTATION RITUAL AS CARNIVAL: CONTROVERSIES OVER MUHARRAM OBSERVANCES IN DARJEELING

When I returned to Darjeeling in 1995, four years after my first visit, I decided to begin with a locality I already knew: the Chowrasta, the plaza that dominates the upper town. I started my fieldwork by chatting with the proprietors of the curio shops clustered around the square: Jolly Arts, Eastern Arts, Habeeb Mullick's. The shopkeepers here are by and large Kashmiri Sunnis, whose families immigrated to Darjeeling during the heyday of the British Empire.

Since the late nineteenth century the town has attracted Muslims from various parts of India: Bihar, West Bengal, Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, and the Punjab were the origins I encountered most frequently. None of the Muslims I met, however, identified himself as Shia. Repeatedly I was told that the town had long since lost whatever resident Shia community it once had. Also well-represented here are émigré Tibetan Buddhists (Tibetan Muslims, too, about whom I offer more information below). Many of Darjeeling's Tibetans fled here as refugees in the 1950s.

My Muslim informants often emphasized the fact that they are a religious minority in Darjeeling. Of the town's population of eighty thousand, they said, there are perhaps three to five thousand Muslims. They referred to the bulk of the population as *pahari*, "hill folk," a catchall term used to describe ethnic Nepalis, Bhutanese, Lepchas, and Sikkimese. Whereas the Muslims were drawn to Darjeeling as merchants, I was told, the hill folk came as plantation laborers to work in the British-run tea gardens.

Such assertions comprised an oversimplification. Several Kashmiri Muslim shopkeepers I spoke with characterized the *paharis'* religion as Hinduism; but in fact I met a number of self-described "hill people" who identified themselves as Muslim. Moreover, Buddhism and animistic traditions are also in evidence. It is not uncommon for two religious traditions to share a sacred site; recall my description of Brahmin priests and Buddhist monks worshipping together at the sanctuary of Mahakal. This syncretistic tradition has been a longstanding characteristic of Darjeeling. As Arthur Jules Dash noted in the 1947 *Bengal District Gazetteer* for Darjeeling, "Accurate classification by religion or religious practice is not easy to accomplish."[6]

As I mentioned above, I began my 1995 season by asking about Muharram in the Chowrasta's curio shops. My first break came at a store called Eastern Arts, operated by one Abd al-Rashid Butt Badami. Squat and balding, perched high on a stool behind a glass counter, he was arguing necklace prices with a knot of Bengali tourists when I entered. I studied the Tibetan statues and hanging *thangka* scrolls on display and sized him up as a possible informant. Outgoing, he seemed, cheerful, affable, calculating. And even as he haggled with the Bengalis, Mr. Abd al-Rashid must have been appraising me. Evidently he decided I was a better catch; for he turned over the other customers to an assistant and called to me.

Tray after tray he lifted from the case, of papier-mâché figurines and old prayer wheels, brass ghost-daggers and cheap tin amulets. Junk, much of it. But I found a pair of good moonstones; and as we admired them together I asked Rashid about his background. Kashmiri, I learned, Sunni Muslim. He and his brother Muhammad Maqbool ran Eastern Arts.

When I told Rashid I wanted to learn about Muharram in Darjeeling, he laughed. "You've come to the right place," he announced. "I know a great deal about Muharram here; and so does my brother. He's the president of the big Muslim association in Darjeeling: the Anjuman-e Islamia. The Anjuman does a lot of the planning for the *jalus* [the public Muharram procession] every year."

As we talked I found myself being overcharged for my moonstones by the smiling Rashid; but the high price (I privately noted it as an "information surcharge") proved worth it. For Rashid introduced me the next day to his brother; and Muhammad Maqbool Butt Badami became one of my best Muharram informants.

Gloomy by temperament, fond of complaining about his stomach pains and a gallbladder operation he'd just survived, Muhammad Maqbool nevertheless was a generous man. Patiently, in the course of over a dozen conversations during the next several weeks, he did his best to answer my questions. He explained that his *anjuman* oversees two Muharram processions in Darjeeling, one organized by the Muslim businessmen of "Saddar Bazaar," the other by the residents of the "Doctor Zakir Husain Busti," an impoverished neighborhood in the lower town. And when I showed interest he invited me to come with him on a series of walks to the Zakir Husain Busti to supervise preparations for the *jalus*.

I have vivid memories of our expeditions to the lower town. Darjeeling is terraced, one row of houses and shops above another on a high narrow hill, its streets connected by winding paths and steep stone stairs. We took our walks in the early evening; and I remember how on our first outing the

mist gathered in the valley below and billowed skyward to the ridges of the upper town. Leaving the Chowrasta, one descends from the tourist's Darjeeling to a poorer settlement, its streets badly lit, its cobblestones greasy with rain and sewage runoff.

As we watched our footing and made our way downhill in the early dark, Muhammad Maqbool talked about Muharram in Darjeeling. And this is the peculiar thing about his Muharram talk: that he seemed both proud and ashamed about his *anjuman*'s participation. Proud, because (as I explain later) Muharram gives the town's Muslims a way of asserting publicly their presence. But ashamed because—as he complained on our first walk—"so many of our Muharram practices are against Islam."

I asked him for an example.

"*Tazias*," he said (these are the replicas of the Karbala martyrs' tombs that are carried in procession). Like the Shias in Hyderabad, Muslims here build *tazias* every year. "Making a *tazia* is like drawing a picture," he asserted, "and there's a *hadith* that says, 'No angel will come to a house where there's a dog or a picture.'"

Later I saw for myself that Darjeeling offers much more blatantly un-Islamic goings-on than the making of *tazias*; but Muhammad wasn't yet prepared to discuss these with me.

Despite his ambivalence, Muhammad Maqbool proved with time to be candid and helpful in introducing me to Darjeeling's Muharram. It is in large measure thanks to him that I was able to witness many of the activities I describe in what follows.

I have said that Muslims are a minority in Darjeeling, but Muslim visibility during Muharram is out of all proportion to their numbers. As is the case with Shia communities in localities such as Hyderabad, Darjeeling's Muharram activity is concentrated primarily in the first ten days of the month. When I visited Muslim neighborhoods in the Chhoti Masjid area in the Lower Bazaar during the 1995 Muharram season, I found groups of teenaged boys, under the supervision of older men, engaged in three kinds of activity: making and decorating *tazias*; drying goatskins and fitting these skins over drums (drum beating plays a large role in Darjeeling's Muharram processions); and practicing sparring with *lathi* sticks (the sparring also forms an important part of the processions).

When I asked the young men the reason for the drums and sticks, I was given a variety of answers. As for the drum-beating, it is: *jowsh lane ke lie*, "to bring forth devotional fervor," in processionists and onlookers alike. "Husain fought alone," one elderly man told me as he watched boys prepare the drums. "We want to show we're with Husain, that we want to be with

him." The stick-fighting, I was told, is a reenactment of the battle of Karbala. But I was also told by several informants, young men and old alike, that the public *lathi* sparring demonstrates to onlookers of all communities that "the Muslims of Darjeeling are able to defend themselves."

When I attempted to quiz the drummers and *lathi* players discreetly on their knowledge of the historical background of the Muharram observances, I found that everyone I spoke to knew that Husain, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, died in battle at Karbala fighting the forces of the caliph Yazid. But their knowledge did not extend much further. When I asked about Zaynab, Sakina, Abu'l Fadl al-Abbas, Fatima Kubra and the "bridegroom of Karbala," Hazrat Qasim ibn Hasan—figures known to virtually every Shia, young and old, whom I had interviewed in Hyderabad—my Darjeeling informants consistently drew a blank. Compared with Hyderabad, their Muharram literacy was very low.

Drumming and stick-fighting in the lower bazaar are supervised by two "Muharram Committees," which are organized by neighborhood: one for the Doctor Zakir Husain Busti, the second for the Saddar Bazaar. There is considerable feeling of competition between the two committees, a point to which I will return. Beginning on the fifth of Muharram, each of the committees organizes nighttime processions in its respective neighborhood. The processionists stop at predesignated points along the route and draw bystanders with drumbeating, *lathi* play, and baton-twirling in which sticks are ignited at both ends and whirled about.

The atmosphere is one of carnival. But I noticed something curious when I accompanied the Zakir Husain Busti's procession on its evening march on the fifth of Muharram (June 5, 1995). As we passed the neighborhood's official Islamic place of worship, the Chhoti Masjid, the drums suddenly went silent. The shouting boys grew voiceless; and it wasn't until we'd left the mosque behind that the drum-pounding and excitement resumed. A young participant said to me by way of explanation, "It's *haram* [forbidden] to make noise with a drum in front of a mosque." Such behavior reflects a certain tension with regard to the orthodoxy of Muharram observances, a tension to which I will refer later.

After performing in their own neighborhoods, the two processions go to the bus depot in the Chowq, the largest gathering spot in Darjeeling's lower bazaar, where they give a concluding display. Older men from each committee see to it that the two groups keep some distance from each other, to preclude jostling and any eruption of hostility.

Early in Muharram the processions are small, comprising only a few dozen boys and teenagers; but night by night the crowds grow, and an

increasing number of older people becomes involved. On the eighth and ninth of Muharram the nighttime processionists pause by arrangement before certain houses whose occupants have announced that they will donate a *nishan* or votive banner to the procession.

Giving a *nishan* constitutes the fulfillment of a *mannat* or vow by the family. The action includes providing tea and sweets for the processionists when they appear before the house. *Nishans,* I was told, are frequently given by 'Nepalis,' that is, Hindu *pahari* (hill folk). They make arrangements to come to the home of a local Muslim family residing along the procession route in the lower bazaar. There they will make the presentation of the *nishan* when the processionists arrive.

One Hindu donor I met explained to me that the previous year he had made a *mannat* for the health of certain of his children. Giving a *nishan* and spending money for food for the Muharram processionists was his way of fulfilling the vow. The cheaper *nishans,* I was told, are made locally. Muslim tailors make the banner itself; Nepali smiths make the metal *alam* or crest, usually in the form of a *hilal* (crescent moon), *panje* (protective hand), or crossed swords. Wealthier families sometimes send to Calcutta to have their *nishans* made there.

I mentioned above that early in the season groups of young men make and decorate *tazias* for the public processions. These objects are not made entirely from scratch; the wooden frames have been saved from the previous year's celebration. Late in the afternoon of the ninth of Muharram, the completed *tazias* are brought outdoors from the sheds where they have been under construction.

A kind of consecration ceremony then takes place. What I watched was the ceremony arranged by the Muharram committee of the Zakir Husain Busti (the locality to which I gave particular attention in my research). The *tazia* is brought out and set in the middle of a *maidan* (public square or open area) in the heart of the neighborhood. A long table is set up directly before the *tazia.* Boys heap the table with paraphernalia of the procession: drums, lathis, and *talwars* (wooden swords). In the twilight burning joss sticks line the table.

Hundreds of people gather from the neighborhood, processionists and onlookers alike: boys, young men, and their adult male supervisors, standing in a semicircle behind the table facing the *tazia;* girls and women at a distance. Closest to the *tazia,* directly behind the table, is a *maulvi* (a Muslim religious scholar). The crowd goes quiet; the playful carnival mood of the gathering momentarily ceases. The *maulvi* recites a series of prayers, first Arabic recitations from the Qur'an, then an invocation in Urdu on behalf of the Muharram committee members and all participants.

But the quiet lasts only a moment. No sooner does the *maulvi* finish than a young man cries out, *"Takbir!"* (the call proclaiming God's greatness) and the crowd responds, *"Allahu akbar!"* (God is most great). Then, to the accompaniment of shouts of "Ya Husain!," drum-beating, and much thrusting aloft of swords, the *tazia* is lifted and slowly carried all the way from the lower bazaar to the Chowq, a distance of perhaps a kilometer.

Progress is slow partly because of the crowds. On previous nights the procession was witnessed primarily by local neighborhood residents, most of them Muslims; but for the ninth and tenth of Muharram, Muslims and non-Muslims alike come to Darjeeling to see the *jalus*, the great Muharram procession. Spectators come from a variety of towns and nearby villages in the surrounding hill country.

The order of procession never varies: the Saddar Bazaar Committee (the older of the two) leads the way, followed by the Zakir Husain Busti. Two wooden platforms, one for the Saddar Bazaar's *tazia*, the other for the Zakir Husain Busti's, await the celebrants in the open area of the Chowq.

Once they arrive, the processionists carrying each portable shrine make a *tawaf* (ritual circumambulation) three times around its platform. Then each *tazia* is lowered onto its platform. Thereafter, throughout the evening, individuals from among the onlookers, most notably women—Muslim and non-Muslim both—come forward to light candles before the *tazias*, make *mannat* vows, and give cash offerings to the Qur'an reciter stationed to one side of the tomb replicas.

On this evening, the ninth of Muharram, there also occurs a *milad* (in other regions usually referred to as a *majlis* among Shias): gatherings in honor of the Imam Husain at the local mosques, in which the *maulvi* chants a *na'at* (an encomium in honor of the Prophet's family) and delivers a sermon on the topic of the significance of Husain's death.

For anyone familiar with *majalis* in Shia localities, the Muharram *milad* I attended in Darjeeling would seem remarkable, and for several reasons. First, only a handful of people attended. Second, although the preacher spoke forcefully, he made no attempt to evoke the pathos of Husain's sufferings, nor did he in any other way try to provoke tears as a response from the congregation. Third, although the congregation listened attentively, they did not wail or slap their thighs or weep into their handkerchiefs or engage in any other overt sign of grief such as I have witnessed at Shia Muharram gatherings in settings ranging from Hyderabad to Ladakh to Chicago.

Ashura, the tenth of Muharram, the day on which Husain died, constitutes the focal point of the season's observances in Darjeeling, just as it does wherever Muharram is observed. On Ashura, throughout the after-

noon the two Muharram committees stage displays of stick-fighting and drum-beating before the *tazias*. That night the tomb models are then lifted up and carried in procession the length of the city. The procession terminates outside of town at the Kagjhora Bridge, where closing prayers are said, the *tazias* are dismantled, and the crowds finally disperse.

I myself—sad to confess—did not get to see the concluding ceremony at the Kagjhora Bridge. Sick—to the point of being weak and trembling, in fact—during the ninth and tenth of Muharram, I managed somehow to document the procession throughout Ashura until late in the evening, but I simply lacked the strength to reach the bridge. This was unfortunate, because I was to learn that a certain controversy surrounds the closing ceremony at Kagjhora.

I first learned of this from Indira Gongba, a Buddhist of Nepali-Tibetan background who outfits trekking expeditions from her shop by the Chowrasta. Her work puts her in touch with porters, suppliers, and all manner of business folk, thus making her an ideal informant. Her temperament, generous and witty, made her a friend to treasure.

Indira told me that the Kagjhora Bridge is the traditional place to which Darjeeling's Hindus come at the end of their *murti* (statue) processions to take their idols for immersion (immersing *murtis* in water is part of the "dismissal" ritual at the conclusion of certain seasonal Hindu festivals, when the god is "released" from the confinement of clay until the following year). "There is a Durga *puja* [worship ritual] in October," she informed me, "and a Sarasvati procession in the spring. Both have processions with statue immersions as the conclusion."

Kag, incidentally, is the Nepali word for crow; *jhora* means waterfall or stream. The 1907 *Bengal District Gazetteer* describes how the bridge got its name: "Kagjhora—The crows' stream, a name given to a mountain rivulet in the station of Darjeeling. The name is said to be due to the fact that a large number of crows used to crowd round the municipal rubbish heap, which was formerly situated close to this stream."[7]

Up until ten or twelve years ago, Muslim informants told me in 1995, Ashura participants immersed the Muharram *tazias* in the water by the Kagjhora Bridge at the end of the procession. But this is no longer done. When I asked why, different Muslims offered different reasons. These can be grouped under three headings: the water level in the stream these days has become very low; the water is "dirty," because of its use by "Nepalis," that is, the local Hindu hill population; immersion is something Hindus do, so Muslims shouldn't.

The above is hearsay. But I can attest to the following as an eyewitness. The most remarkable aspect of the final procession on Ashura was that pride

of place in carrying the *tazias* was given to young girls, perhaps ten to fifteen years of age, dressed very elegantly in *shalwar-qameez* (baggy trouser-tunic) outfits in a variety of dazzling colors, who scrambled for a place around each *tazia* so that they could be assured of being able to participate in carrying the tomb replica (in fact, I noticed that girls in the Chowq had begun assembling around the shrines as much as an hour before the final procession started, clearly eager to assure themselves a place). Their eyes attractively outlined in kohl, shawls of crimson and green and electric-blue draped about their shoulders, they spotted my camera, waved, and laughed as I snapped photos. It was good to see their confidence and sense of fun.

Although many of these girls took care as they marched to keep their *dupatta* scarves arranged modestly around their heads, they were impressively forceful in the cry they shouted as they carried the *tazias* through the streets: "*Karbala dur hay; jana zurur hay!*" (Karbala is far away; there must we make our way.) Over and over they repeated the cry, clearly relishing the chance to take the lead in the proceedings.

I was taken with the girls' exuberance. After Ashura I asked about these participants. My Kashmiri shopkeeper informants seemed embarrassed. "The girls carrying *tazias* are *paharis*," said one clerk sourly. He grimaced. "None of what they do is really Islam." The implication to this Kashmiri's use of the word *pahari* seemed to be that none of these local hill folk really knows anything about the proper forms of Muslim ritual behavior.

Indira Gongba offered a very different perspective. She agreed that the "*tazia* girls" are *pahari*; but she used the term with affection and pride. "The hill girls are very fashionable," she said when I commented on how well turned-out these young ladies were. "They like to dress up on every possible occasion."

Speaking of women's roles in Darjeeling's Muharram: I have already referred to women's *mannat* (vow-making) and girls' participation in carrying the *tazias*; also noteworthy is that women hold their own *milad* (Muharram gatherings) during the first ten days of Muharram. Sometimes a male *maulvi* is brought in to preach. But at other times, I was told, the women's gatherings will be addressed by a woman respected for her knowledge of the Qur'an who will offer the sermon that comprises the heart of the service.

Given the fact that many Muslims throughout the world think of Muharram primarily as a liturgical season observed by Shias, and given the fact that there seem to be virtually no Shias residing in Darjeeling today, it is understandable that some of Darjeeling's Muslims object strongly to their own local custom of Muharram observances. And some of these critics, I must admit, are not eager for Darjeeling's Muharram to become the object of study by outsiders.

In fact, the day after I arrived in Darjeeling in 1995, two Muslim gentlemen (Kashmiri Sunnis, both of them) informed me that time spent on Darjeeling's Muharram was a waste. "Why do you want to study Muharram here?" one of them said with very evident annoyance. "Why do you want to study the *jalus*? The *jalus* is nothing! It has nothing to do with Islam. Real Islam is the same all over." He then offered to lecture me on Islam's Five Pillars of Faith.

During the course of my fieldwork I collected the objections made by those Muslims who criticized Darjeeling's Muharram. Some stated simply that it constituted "innovation," that there was no justification for such practices in the Qur'an or *sunnah* of the Prophet. Others dismissed Muharram as something that Shias observe; "and Shias," as my Five Pillars friend observed tartly, "are not really Muslim."

Still others referred to the Muharram procession as simply a *tamasha* (a spectacle). The term was not meant as a compliment. These critics also claimed that a great deal of alcohol gets consumed during the Muharram festivities (something I noticed in the Chowq on the ninth and tenth of Muharram, to a certain extent among some of the young male bystanders, to a lesser extent among some of the drum-beaters and stick-fighters).

One critic of Darjeeling's Muharram, an earnest and nervous young man, introduced himself to me as a "Deobandi" (the term refers to an Indian traditionist movement which since the nineteenth century has strenuously opposed practices it regards as un-Islamic).[8] He confronted me on Ashura among the crowds in the Chowq. "What you see here," he said, waving his arm with contempt in the direction of a group of obviously drunken drummers, "is the kind of activity the tyrant Yazid and his men would have done, not Husain."

Some of the more sophisticated objections to the town's Muharram observances were voiced by members of the Indian Tibetan Muslim Welfare Association of Darjeeling. The Tibetan Muslims whom I interviewed told me that their presence in Darjeeling dates from 1961, when they were "repatriated" from Tibet in the wake of the Chinese Communist invasion. The term "repatriation" is used because Tibetan Muslims, unlike Tibetan Buddhists, are regarded here as Indian nationals. In Darjeeling they work as hoteliers, shopkeepers in the bazaar, and makers of handicrafts. Many of these ethnic Tibetans (known locally as "Lhasa Muslims") gather for conversation at the Tibetan-run "Society Hotel," which is located not far from the Chowrasta.

These Lhasa Muslims pray in Arabic, converse in Tibetan with each other, and speak Urdu with other Darjeeling Muslims. And they pride

themselves on being strictly observant Muslims, Shafi'i (as distinct from the Hanafi legal tradition that is more characteristic of the region). "Muharram," one of the Tibetan Muslim Association's officers said to me, "is supposed to be a time of sadness; so it's wrong to dance in the street," which is how he characterized Darjeeling's observances. He stated that local Tibetan Muslims observe Ashura by prayer and silent recollection in mosques. Otherwise they take no part in Muharram and avoid any participation in the public *jalus*.

Disapproval of Muharram practices reflected other tensions between Tibetan and local Muslims. When I returned to Darjeeling for a brief visit in 1997, I made the acquaintance of Saiyid Ahmad Baba, a highly educated Lhasa Muslim who is a government functionary with the Indian Administrative Service. He told me that in the previous year there had been a scandalous outbreak of bad feeling within the Muslim community.

According to Saiyid Ahmad (and later I met members of the Anjuman-e Islamia who confirmed his version of events), in 1996 there had been two candidates for president of Darjeeling's *anjuman*, one from Bihar, backed by the "Indian" faction, the other a Lhasa Muslim, backed by the ethnic Tibetans. Both sides tried to bus in outside supporters to boost the voter rolls. A fight broke out at the association's headquarters; and the police came and arrested various individuals.

Resentment, understandably, seems to linger. "I'm very comfortable with fellow Tibetans here," said Saiyid Ahmad, "no matter whether they're Buddhist. Also with Sherpas, Nepalis. But I have no close Muslim friends here, even though I am Muslim." He went on to cite the East Pakistan/West Pakistan conflicts of the early 1970s and the formation of Bangladesh as another instance where animosity toward other ethnic groups outweighed Islamic religious solidarity. He then repeated the criticism I had heard voiced by other Lhasa Muslims, that Darjeeling's Muharram is nothing but *tamasha*, a spectacle.

Muslims who do in fact participate in Darjeeling's Muharram processions acknowledged that there are virtually no Shias in the town. They explained Darjeeling's observances in various ways, some claiming that Darjeeling had once had a substantial Shia minority, but that the Shias drifted away after partition and independence. These long-gone Shias, my informants said, had started the custom. Anjuman-e Islamia officers told me that there is a "substantial" Shia population in a village called Islampur, near Siliguri (some four hours by car from Darjeeling). Until the late 1980s, they said, Shia *matam* groups traveled from Islampur to Darjeeling to participate in the *jalus*. "Then the Shias in Islampur," one of the *anjuman* officers claimed, "started doing their own procession, around 1990, and now they don't come to Darjeeling anymore."

Other local participants pointed out to me that much of Darjeeling's Sunni population migrated from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, the Punjab, and cities in West Bengal such as Calcutta, all areas with a strong tradition of public Muharram processions. The Indian plains people, they said, brought the custom with them. Bihari immigrants in particular had brought with them from their home province their tradition of *lathi* stick-play ("Biharis," one informant asserted, "are Muharram specialists"). A Muslim meatcutter whom I interviewed at his butcher's stall told me, "I'm a *pahari*. We hill people learned how to perform Muharram from the plains people."

When I asked Darjeeling's Muharram participants why they held processions, all the men I interviewed were quick to say that they want to honor the Imam Husain. In explaining what motivates their observances, however, no one initiated any reference to the term *savab* ("merit" or "reward": the notion that one can gain religious merit in this life or the next in exchange for honoring the Karbala martyrs).

This surprised me, as *savab* had cropped up frequently in my discussions of Muharram with Hyderabad's Shias. When I introduced the term in Darjeeling, some of my informants seized on it and assured me that yes, they believed that they gain favor with God by honoring Husain. But their agreement struck me as perfunctory. Again, my impression was that Darjeeling's Sunnis, both those who observe Muharram and those who don't, lack any detailed knowledge of the history and theology of Karbala as articulated by Shia Muslims.

One distinction that struck me forcefully as I interviewed Darjeeling's Muharram participants was the care they took in differentiating themselves from Shias. Under no circumstances did they want to be confused with Shias, despite the fact that they shared in common a very active tradition of Muharram observance. "Look carefully, Professor David," one informant told me, "and you'll see that we don't do *matam* when we hold our *jalus*."

This proved to be true. *Matam* (breast-beating and other lamentation gestures in honor of the deceased) is a very important part of Muharram observances among Shia congregations in India and elsewhere; but Darjeeling's Sunnis don't engage in this action at all.

My informants rationalized this by saying that Shias regard Muharram as a time of loss and mourning and so spend their time weeping and beating themselves. Sunnis, however, regard Muharram as a time to commemorate Husain's spiritual victory: for Karbala constitutes Islam's triumph over worldly corruption, the victory of truth over falsehood even in the face of military defeat. One of my informants explained things more simply: "*Matam* is something Shias do; and we're not Shias."

Muharram as a Sunni-sponsored event is not by any means unique to Darjeeling among Indian locales. In a survey of Muharram rituals in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra state, a scholar named A. R. Saiyid made the following observation:

> Those familiar with the observance of Moharram by Sunni Muslim communities residing in India's rural and semi-rural areas (including small- and medium-sized towns whose ethos is, or has been, essentially rural), are aware of the fact that in many of these communities the first ten days of Moharram are "celebrated" as if it were some sort of a festival. Several rituals, ceremonies and "local" traditions are fulfilled which do not have the remotest relationship with Islam . . . Indeed, in many instances rural Sunni Muslim communities . . . give little inkling to their non-Muslim neighbours that Moharram is not some sort of an *Id* [that is, a joyous and festive religious celebration], but instead, is a grim reminder of a dastardly tragedy that occurred in the annals of Islam during this month.[9]

Saiyid goes on to speculate why it is that Sunni Muslims in rural and small-town India not only observe Muharram but celebrate it as a festival. Analyzing religious rituals from a functionalist sociological perspective, he describes Muharram as a "need-fulfillment mechanism" linked to "tension-management." That is, according to this view, Muharram as carnival can serve the function of a communal safety valve.[10]

"In contrast to the Hindu calendar," asserts Saiyid, "the Muslim calendar is a rather lean affair." That is to say, the Islamic year offers relatively few canonically-sanctioned celebratory feasts. Noting that publicly performed rituals can serve to foster "inter-group integration in culturally/religiously pluralistic situations" (namely, in mixed Hindu-Muslim villages), he evaluates the major Islamic feast days for their "integrative" potential. "The two *Ids*," he argues—and here he refers to the Muslim observances linked to fast-breaking at the end of Ramadan and the ritual slaughter of animals during the month of Dhu'l-hijja in commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice—"are characterized by too strong a religious content to easily permit an integrative function . . . Moharram, on the other hand, not being a rigorously defined religious event, could be more easily torn out of its real—an essentially political/historical—context and transformed into a mass festival."[11]

Needless to say, Muharram can only be classed as "not . . . rigorously defined" in settings where insufficient numbers of Shias are present to assert Muharram's role in perpetuating the sorrow-filled memory of Husain's

suffering and death. Darjeeling is just such a setting. Its present-day population largely lacks Shias but does include Sunnis whose immigrant families know of Muharram from the great Ashura processions held in cities such as Lucknow and Calcutta. In Darjeeling, however, the Sunni community is free to redefine Muharram to suit their needs in a city where they coexist as a minority with a population that is overwhelmingly non-Muslim.

Some of the more articulate explanations for Darjeeling's Muharram observances were offered to me by officers in the Anjuman-e Islamia (Darjeeling's "Muslim Association," an organization to which I have referred above). Founded in 1909 (but tracing its history back even further: before 1909 it had existed as the "Mohammadan Association"), the *anjuman* claims it has some one thousand dues-paying members. One of the association's vice presidents showed me a copy of its constitution, adopted in 1976, which mandates that the group's members meet annually prior to the onset of the Muharram season, at which time "the program for the ensuing Muharram shall be finalized."

Among the Muharram responsibilities of the *anjuman* are: obtaining permission from the police each year for holding public processions; collecting donations from local merchants to defray the costs of the celebrations; and supervising the activities of the two neighborhood Muharram committees, specifically with an eye to preventing any eruption of tensions between the two competing processions.

The neighborhoods compete in various ways. Participants from one procession try to outdo the other in the quality of their stick-play, the skill and sheer noise level of their drumming, and the eye-catching flamboyance of the *tazias* they design. (In 1995 the Saddar Bazaar's *tazia* displayed artfully incised verses of an Urdu poem about Karbala, while the Zakir Husain Busti's tomb replica featured fortress-like sheet metal walls and fanciful Gothic towers.) Success is reflected in the size of the crowds each procession draws. Fights between members of the two different processions have sometimes broken out, I was told; hence the importance of the *anjuman*'s supervisory role.

Given the *anjuman*'s active commitment to the ordering of Muharram observances, it is not surprising that its officers had a great deal to say in explaining to me Muharram's popularity in Darjeeling. Frequently my informants drew my attention to the ways in which Darjeeling's Muharram brings the whole community together. Hindus participate actively in at least some of the season's customs, praying before the *tazias*, making votive offerings, coming to watch the stick-fighting.

At the same time, however, the *anjuman*'s officers made the following point: "The Muharram *jalus* is the only procession we have in Islam. It's the only *jalus* recognized by the government, the only *jalus* for which we can get

a permit. And the Hindus have so many processions all during the year! At Muharram, with our *jalus*, we can say, 'There are Muslims here; there are Muslims here in Darjeeling.'"

This comment, and others like it that I heard again and again during my time in Darjeeling, cuts to the heart of the matter. Regardless of its origin, regardless of its associations with Shiism elsewhere in India, Muharram is observed in Darjeeling because it constitutes a legally permissible way of asserting Darjeeling's Muslim presence. Concomitant with this was the very evident satisfaction expressed by the *anjuman* officer Muhammad Maqbool Butt Badami as he explained to me, "At Muharram the government sweeps the streets for us. The government moves cars out of the way of our procession in the Chowq." There's some gratification for a minority community in getting positive attention from the government.

Other, unstated factors presented themselves as I watched the processions for myself. Some are comic and touching. On Ashura, as I observed goings-on in the Chowq where the crowds gathered and stick-fighting displays took place, I saw families and groups of friends pose carefully in front of the *tazias* while professional photographers took their picture. Some enterprising photographers (one of whom I had last seen hustling business from tourists in the Chowrasta) even offered silver-painted wooden swords for boys who wanted to pose as the fighting Imam Husain.

Muharram in Darjeeling is a time for socializing and festivity, despite its historical roots in tragedy and loss. On the ninth of Muharram I was invited to a very fine dinner at the home of a Muslim (a member of the executive board of the Zakir Husain Busti Muharram Committee) in the lower bazaar. Again and again while we were eating, friends dropped by to say hello or to ask questions about plans for the processions.

At intervals knots of children dressed in green, accompanied by one or two adults, appeared at the door begging for alms. My host explained that families will sometimes pledge to have their children beg during Muharram if a wish is granted. Fulfilling this *mannat* involves parents and children going from door to door together on the eve of Ashura asking friends for small gifts of cash (the money, I was told, is not kept by the children but is donated to charity). This gave the evening a bit of the feeling of trick or treat.

But there is a dark side to the festivities. Muharram in Darjeeling gives license to competitive and aggressive instincts, sometimes properly channeled, sometimes not. Marshals appointed by the Anjuman-e Islamia supervise stick-fighting during the processions and try hard to keep the crowds clear of the six-foot staves. But injuries occur. I saw a young man struck full in the face by his sparring partner. He collapsed and was dragged away into

the crowd by his friends, while another enthusiast—undaunted—leapt from the circle of onlookers, picked up the downed man's stick, and challenged the remaining player. What disturbed me most was that the individual who had wounded the young man was a marshal, an elder, supposedly in charge of preventing such injuries.

On this same evening another young man smelling strongly of alcohol stood a few feet away from me, throwing himself about in time to the rhythm set by the drummers. He drew a knife and began leaping up and down, slashing the air as a kind of accompaniment to the beat.

I did a leap also—backwards and out of the way—and then drew the attention of a pair of supervisors to the drunkard's actions. They spent an anxious few minutes talking him into putting away his weapon.

"Too full of *jowsh* [fervor]," commented a bystander sagely. "He's gotten too full of *jowsh*."

At such moments Darjeeling's Muharram acquires the prime-time entertainment flavor of *American Gladiators*, and it becomes easier to understand Deobandi objections to the *jalus*.

Or consider the case of one thirty-six-year-old whom I'll call Mahmoud. By his own account Mahmoud is a former rum drinker and drum player who as a youth had always been in the thick of Muharram processions.

We first met in Darjeeling's lower bazaar, at a cigarette kiosk opposite a shed where boys were hammering tin ornaments for a *tazia*. It was night, and the only light came from a bare overhead bulb that swayed and cast shadows as it was brushed by clusters of moths. That evening I was with Muhammad Maqbool, president of the Anjuman-e Islamia, who often complained of Muharram excesses. As I was introduced to Mahmoud I sensed at once Mr. Maqbool's distaste, as if he wanted to say: the *anjuman* disapproves of such types.

My own reaction was different. I saw Mahmoud and said to myself: now here is a visage worth studying. Gaunt, bony, with great haunted eyes, a saint's face from some twilit icon. But the impression changed in an instant. The kiosk clerk made a joke and Mahmoud laughed: a toothy satyr's grin.

For me, Mahmoud was a man one couldn't help liking. He told fine stories, many of them involving a chuckle at his own expense. Example: how one year he drank and drank throughout Muharram, all the while trusting for protection in a *ta'wiz* (an amulet inscribed with Qur'an verses) that he kept tied around his neck. But the talisman wouldn't stay in place and repeatedly slipped off, all on account of, Mahmoud said, the bad life he was leading. The *ta'wiz* was giving him warnings; but he paid them no mind. Finally, during one rum-soaked night of rain the amulet dropped to the

ground while Mahmoud was walking home; and for his sins he fell into a ditch. "Punishment," he pronounced, and he grinned.

Today Mahmoud is a supervising member of one of the Muharram committees in the lower bazaar. Now married and middle-aged, he limits severely his sons' participation in the *jalus*; and as we walked about the bazaar one evening he confessed that many of Darjeeling's Muharram customs could scarcely pass muster as orthodox.

Then we happened upon a knot of stick-fighters practicing by torchlight. Mahmoud halted; his voice trailed away. His eyes glowed as he watched the group; and he began to reminisce.

Seven years earlier, he recalled, the 1988 Muharram observances were imperiled by the Gurkhaland Agitation. Local Nepali Hindus, he said, voicing the cry, "Darjeeling is not part of West Bengal!," were pressing for local autonomy. The government asked that all religious communities refrain from holding public processions. A big Kali *puja* that had been scheduled at one of the town's major Hindu shrines was cancelled.

Nevertheless, Mahmoud told me, Darjeeling's Muslims decided to go ahead with their Muharram *jalus*. "One night," he said animatedly, "I was marching at the very front of the *jalus* when a bunch of Hindus with guns in their hands came up, looking to cause trouble. So we came to a halt and I had the idea of doing *namaz* [Muslim ritual prayer]. And there I was, down on the ground, praying, doing my prostrations, staring straight ahead, the *tazia* not far away, the *nishans* behind me, my friends to either side holding *talwars* to guard me. And I didn't budge; I just kept praying. And those Hindus didn't dare come near us. They dropped their guns and ran away! That's why I have a lot of faith in Muharram."

As Mahmoud stood beside me watching the stick-players and talking about old times, I began to understand some of the ambivalence and attraction felt by this man with regard to Muharram: prayer, danger, group solidarity, an adrenalinated readiness to stand firm in the first line of confrontation. For him the Gurkhaland Movement comprised a challenge to be countered by an assertion of Muslim identity, an assertion manifested by Darjeeling's Muharram procession. Mahmoud's face was alight as he recalled the glory days of 1988. Then he turned and said once more that he wanted to make sure that his sons didn't get carried away by Muharram.

I, too, was caught up in recollection and reflection as he talked. What I was remembering were the relatively disciplined and highly structured liturgies organized by the Shia men's guilds of Hyderabad, with their moods of lamentation rather than license, with their rhythmic chest-pounding regulated strictly by the group recitation of poetry, with their

carefully orchestrated displays of energy. It's true that Darjeeling shares in common with Hyderabad the observance of Muharram. But the difference between the two is like the difference between slam-dancing and ballet. Both could be construed as participating in the same art form, but the link between the two is tenuous.

The problem, as I see it, is this: Muharram is acknowledged by Shias everywhere as absolutely central to Shia life and Shia liturgy. Thus in a setting like Hyderabad the best intellects, the finest artistic talents in the Shia community, contribute to the supervision of Muharram and to the creation of religious artforms (such as *nauha* lamentation poetry) linked to the liturgy. In Darjeeling, however, the best intellects are ambivalent about Muharram. Some community leaders distance themselves from Muharram altogether. Others, notably in the Anjuman-e Islamia, attempt to regulate the processions for the good of all participants, but they are not as actively involved in the activities as Shia leaders would be in corresponding liturgies in Hyderabad.

In Darjeeling Muharram is not given the same attention or central importance that it is accorded in a Shia community. Consequently aggression and self-indulgence are monitored less closely than they might be otherwise. Nevertheless, despite the risks associated with the liturgies, Muharram in Darjeeling is important to its Muslim population, as a means of social interaction, of artistic expression and emotional release, as a series of rituals that permit positive links with non-Muslims while asserting Islamic communal identity.

S I X

Horse of Karbala: Ladakh, Shia Ritual, and Devotional Literature Relating to Zuljenah

INTRODUCTION. WELCOME TO LADAKH: MY SUMMONS TO THE POLICE BARRACKS

The Ladakh business started in Darjeeling.

June 1995: I had largely finished my Muharram research for the season and was lounging one evening in the dining room of the Windamere Hotel. Weak and still recovering from the stomach cramps that had plagued me for days, I was content to sit quietly sipping club soda and watch the other tables, with their family groups of Bengali tourists on holiday. I still had two weeks left to my itinerary before I had to return stateside, and I sat asking myself whether I had strength enough to do any more work in India.

A newcomer entered. The waiter asked if I'd mind sharing my table. He waved his hand in apology. The room was full.

My companion was a young man, a law student, I learned, from Holland. I listened to him talk of his studies in Amsterdam, of the twelve-month grant he'd won to do comparative research in Delhi on international human rights issues, of the vacation he'd just taken to wander India and get away from the heat in the plains.

I asked where he'd been on his vacation.

Ladakh, he told me. He had wanted to go because he heard it was a beautiful place, unspoiled, mountain-ringed. "A kind of Shangri-La," he confessed, looking embarrassed at the romanticism of the name, and then to cover his embarrassment said that in any case he'd known almost nothing about Ladakh and wasn't that enough of a reason to go somewhere?

I told him it seemed enough of a reason to me.

For that matter I, too, knew almost nothing about Ladakh. I'd read it was once an independent Buddhist kingdom but now formed part of India, comprising roughly the northeast quadrant of Jammu and Kashmir State and sharing a border with Pakistan and Tibet. Remote, high-altitude, beyond the far northern slope of the Himalayas, Ladakh sounded to me like an appealingly romantic location. And I was familiar enough with the old travel literature of British India to know that Ladakh had exerted a similar fascination during the Raj.

For proof, glance at a memoir from 1926 entitled *The Road to Lamaland: Impressions of a Journey to Western Thibet,* by one M. L. A. Gompertz, a major in the Tenth Baluch Regiment of the Indian Army. ("Lamaland" was Gompertz's cheerfully irreverent designation for Ladakh.) Stationed at a military base and bored to distraction by office work—he described himself at the memoir's beginning as having been surrounded "on three sides by enormous bundles of correspondence, files which had somehow to be kept moving either upwards, downwards, or sideways"—Gompertz dreamed of escape. "Savage leave was indicated—somewhere in the blue—somewhere where people don't dress for dinner or expect to have cards left on them—somewhere in the high hills under the snow."[1] Salvation came in the form of an invitation from the British political officer at Leh.

> Leh [Gompertz explains] is the capital of Ladakh—and Ladakh is another name for Western Thibet, where they grow Lamas and yaks and monasteries and devil dancers. Ladakh is Thibet pure and simple, but in the thirties of the last century one Zorawar Singh—an adventurous general of the Dogra Maharajah Gulab Singh of Jummu on the edge of the Punjab—annexed it for his master, and when after the Sikh wars we sold the Vale of Kashmir to Gulab Singh, . . . Ladakh and Baltistan were thus linked up into a compact block with the Jummu territories . . . the whole forming, to my mind and to that of many others, the most fascinating corner of the Indian Empire.[2]

Accompanied by three ponymen and two fox terriers, Major Gompertz promptly fled his office for a hiking trek through Kashmir (such things

were possible then, and safe) and over the mountain passes to the Ladakhi district capital, Leh. (The major, by the way, took thought for his canines. When tired, the terriers were settled in open pannier-baskets atop the ponies, from which vantage point they surveyed Ladakh's vistas. Myself an indulgent dog lover, I envied Gompertz his luck in being able to bring along his animals on the journey.)

A correction to Gompertz's text. Ladakh in fact is not Tibet "pure and simple" but is something far more singular: an old intersection of overland commerce, the ancient caravan highway linking central Asia with India, a meeting point of Islamic and Buddhist cultures.

But Gompertz seems to have reflected accurately the fantasies of many plains-based English servants of the Raj in describing Ladakh as "the most fascinating corner of the Indian Empire." Witness a romance from 1909 called *The Great Amulet,* written by Maud Diver, a popular novelist of British India. The hero of her story is Captain Eldred Lenox, a silent Scotsman and a lover of solitude. On foot he travels, "over the Zoji-la Pass, into the shadeless, fantastic desolation of Ladak; and on, across stark desert and soundless snow-fields, to Leh, the terminus of all caravans from India and Central Asia. Here Lenox . . . spent two days with one Captain Burrows of the Bengal Cavalry, who, with a handful of half-starved Kashmiri soldiers, upheld the interests of the British Raj on this uttermost edge of Empire . . . The old charm of the Road, the 'glory of going on,' that works like madness in the blood, was strong upon him as ever."[3]

Appealing. The impulse came to me: could I justify a side trip to Ladakh before heading home? Would my troublesome stomach permit such a venture?

My Dutch tablemate broke into the dream. "I saw something strange," he said, "while I was in Leh last week on vacation." He described what he had seen: young men in some kind of religious procession on the street, beating themselves, drawing blood as they hit their heads with chains and knife blades. He said he didn't understand this; he thought Ladakh was Buddhist, and he was pretty sure Buddhists didn't scourge themselves.

This news made me sit up. It sounded as if the Ladakhi town of Leh boasted a Shia population, a population, moreover, that engaged in public demonstrations of *zanjiri-matam.*

I now had my reason to make a side trip to Ladakh. Shia self-flagellation ritual: my research field, after all. The "old charm of the Road" had had its way with me, distressed stomach notwithstanding. The next morning I booked a flight via Delhi to Leh.

From Delhi a sixty-minute flight brought me into Ladakh. Air travel is too fast, leaving no time to introduce oneself gradually to a new world

such as this. But the flight to Leh has its own splendors. The plane skimmed above the mountaintops, affording views of ice peaks touched by sunlight. Then we dipped beneath cloud cover.

Below: a vast open flatland, stark and rock-strewn, bisected by the green snake-line of the Indus River. The plane slowed, dipped yet lower, banked for final descent. Clusters of houses came into view, close to cultivated fields, all huddled along the river that makes settled life here possible.

My first impressions of Leh were all positive. At an altitude of nearly 12,000 feet, the town offers everywhere limitless blue skies, horizoned by a line of snow-capped mountains. After Darjeeling's heavy monsoon clouds and constant damp, the air here seemed electric, alive.

My first morning in Ladakh, I walked the length of the town's bazaar, marveling at the bright red prayer drums positioned at street crossings, taking pleasure in the warm cinnamon-orange colors of old monastery walls. On a hill overlooking the town perched the ancient royal palace. With its multistoried terraces and ascending rows of windows, it seemed a small-scale version of the Tibetan Potala in Lhasa. But Leh's palace offers a special piquancy, for it is near neighbor to the Sunni Jami Mosque whose minaret dominates the bazaar. A pleasing blend, I thought, of Ladakh's Buddhist and Islamic heritage. All satisfyingly exotic.

In recent years, I was to learn, Ladakh's blend of Islam and Buddhism has become none too pleasing, at least not for many of Leh's inhabitants. That day of my arrival in June 1995 I was still ignorant of the "Social Boycott" (to be described later), the communal riots of July 1989, the stoning of mosques and monasteries, and the lingering bitterness that has affected Muslim-Buddhist relations in Leh district ever since.

But even in my state of ignorance that first day, I could sense the presence of problems in my Shangri-La. Armed security police stood about at street corners. Army trucks, one after another, roared through the bazaar throwing up dust; soldiers crouched in the back and squinted against the grit. I saw graffiti painted on walls: "Kashmir out of Ladakh." "Ladakh is not part of Kashmir." "Autonomy for Ladakh." (Many Ladakhis, I soon learned, resent their region's administrative subordination to Kashmir.)

As I hiked in the vicinity of Leh township later that week, I passed a number of military bases: Ladakh Scouts; Indo-Tibetan Border Force. Ladakh is a politically sensitive area, not only because of the recent strains in local Buddhist-Muslim relations, but also because of Ladakh's disputed boundaries with Pakistan and Chinese-occupied Tibet. On one hike back into town I was passed by a dozen tanks on maneuvers, their treads grinding

over the flatland. Sand clouds blew up around them. In the nearest vehicle a tank driver's head protruded from the turret, his face scarved against the dirt-whirl. He spared a moment for a friendly wave.

Political uncertainties and military presence notwithstanding, I used my first week in Ladakh to begin to learn about Leh's Shia rituals. I was staying at a hotel run by Kashmiri Sunnis from Srinagar. The hotel was called Sun 'n' Sand, an irrepressibly cheerful name. Ghulam Rasul, the desk clerk, confirmed in reply to my questions that there had been a big procession on Ashura in the main bazaar, and that, yes, there had been many flagellants beating themselves. The procession, he told me, featured a horse representing Zuljenah. This is the name of the martyr Husain's horse, ridden by the Imam at the battle of Karbala.

A Zuljenah procession: although such liturgies take place in many parts of South Asia, I had never yet seen one for myself. I wanted to learn more.

For the next several days I wandered about the town, introducing myself to shopkeepers, tour guides, taxi drivers, anyone who would talk to me, handing out my business cards marked "Loyola University, Chicago" (my employer at the time), collecting bits of information about Muharram practices in Leh. Those business cards were to come back to haunt me; but this I return to below.

Early one evening I stopped to hail a road-repair crew shoveling gravel outside the branch office of the State Bank of India. A farouche bunch, this: fiercely shy, their faces Mongolian, wind-seared and sun-blasted, their clothes an impoverished tatter of grease-stained patches over old ragged coats. Bent-backed, with gnarled hands, they leaned on their digging tools and stared. Words passed among them in Balti. Who is this Feringhee, I guessed them to be saying, and what does he want?

But their foreman spoke Urdu and seemed happy to chat. They were all Shias, he said, from Kargil, a town in western Ladakh near the Line of Control. Yes, they had been here in town for Ashura and the Zuljenah procession. A shame I had missed it. He turned to his colleagues to tell them what the foreigner was asking about.

This set loose a flow of talk. The foreman translated. If the foreigner wished to know more about Zuljenah, let him go to the main bazaar, not far from the Jami Masjid, and look for the *matam-serai*.

Matam-serai: "lamentation seraglio," if you like. This is the Ladakhi name for what in Hyderabad is known as an *ashurkhana*: a Shia gathering place, a site set aside for Muharram gatherings. Outside the *matam-serai*, perched high above its doorway, they told me, was a placard painted with the likeness of Zuljenah. Worth a look, they said.

"Where exactly in the main bazaar?," I asked. I hadn't noticed this placard before.

"Ham sat sat chalenge. Aie." The foreman put down his shovel, wiped his hands against his coat. "We'll go together. Come."

Soon we stood outside the *matam-serai*'s entrance, the foreman, his crew (who didn't want to miss the diversion), and I, gazing up at the Zuljenah placard. The painting showed a white stallion, riderless, arrow-pierced, its chest streaming blood. In the background: the battlefield of Karbala and a row of tents representing the encampment of Husain's besieged family. The sky in this painting is dark, almost black. But the black is relieved by a glowing calligraphic sun-disk in which are inscribed in Arabic the names of Allah and Muhammad's holy family. The sun disk glows directly above the Horse of Karbala.

The picture is bordered on all four sides by a margin filled with calligraphic lettering in several different hands. On the left is a brief exquisite Ashura poem in Urdu:

The cypress trees and jasmine mourn
Today, this very day.
The flower gardens are afflicted
Today, this very day.
The songbirds, too, feel their hearts broken
Today, this very day.
Open is the gate of sorrow
Today, this very day.

I read it out in Urdu to the foreman, who translated for the appreciative crew. This, while we stood in the main bazaar, amid the traffic of freight trucks, motorbikes, fruit vendors, passing idlers. Two soldiers with rifles walked by, stopped, studied us studying Zuljenah.

The foreman asked me to read more. In a different hand, I explained, was painted the following at the base of the picture:

You have restored to life
the honor of humankind.
Until Resurrection Day
the world will never forget your message.

Obviously, commented the foreman, an address to the Imam Husain.

The two riflemen were joined by another soldier, then a fourth. Not hostile, certainly, but curious as to just what I was doing.

I kept reading. Across the top of the placard was inscribed:

Zuljenah, the Winged One of the Imam Husain,
peace be upon him: Martyr of Karbala.

And in the right-hand margin was a poem in Urdu:

Zuljenah's Account.
This horse struck its head
against the earth and spoke:
I have lost my rider;
my rider is dead.
What are you asking, o wretched one?
My lord, the bearer of a kingly name,
having been inflicted with wounds
numbering one thousand, nine hundred and fifty,
at that moment swooned
and fell upon the ground.

I was just remarking to myself on the appropriateness of displaying a poem that describes Zuljenah as participating in *matam* ("This horse struck its head against the earth") at the entrance to a *matam-serai* consecrated to the ritual enactment of grief, when someone appeared beside me to claim my attention. "Professor David?"

It was Ghulam Rasul, the desk clerk from Sun 'n' Sand. In his hand he held a piece of notepaper. He had a telephone message, he said. The hotel manager had just jotted this down and told Ghulam to go find me.

The note said: DP Please meet To SSP Leh.

The road crew stepped nearer for a better look. So did the soldiers.

"SSP?" I was puzzled. "What's that?"

"Senior Superintendent of Police." Ghulam looked nervous. In charge of security matters, he explained. Apparently the superintendent had just called the hotel and was urgently trying to find me. He wanted a chat with me, he said.

Oh? This did not sound good. A thousand thoughts squirreled through my head. What did the police want? Had I been asking unwelcome questions? Had I made someone paranoid? Was I being followed?

I looked about. The foreman, the road crew, the soldiers: all watched me with interest.

"The manager," said Ghulam Rasul, still nervous, "asked me to bring you back to the hotel."

At the hotel the manager seemed as uneasy as his clerk. The SSP had phoned again in my absence, he announced, to say that he had decided to invite me to a private dinner in the police barracks. A chance for a chat.

The clerk and the manager exchanged glances. "Why don't you go upstairs," the manager suggested, "and relax in your room until the police come?"

I went upstairs and waited, although relaxed was not the word to describe my state of mind.

A half-hour later came a knock at my door. Ghulam Rasul again. He stood in the hotel corridor. Beside him were two uniformed policemen, bearded Sikhs, their turbans an elegant powder-blue.

One Sikh turned to Ghulam Rasul and asked him something. I didn't understand what he said. The clerk nodded in reply.

The Sikh said one word. "*Aie.*" Come.

I walked down the stairs, a policeman on either side of me, as if to forestall any mad dash for freedom on my part. I passed the manager on the landing. He and his clerk each had the same look on their faces: curiosity, pity, self-congratulation at not being the one to be hauled off to the police barracks for an evening "chat."

Two vehicles waited outside, a military jeep and a sedan. I was placed in the back of the sedan. There sat an officer faultlessly turned out, khaki uniform, neatly pressed, swagger stick, high-gloss boots. He introduced himself: V. K. Singh, SSP. "Welcome to Ladakh," he said, and he nodded to the driver. Our convoy set off, the jeep in the lead, clearing our way through the traffic.

Officer Singh was polite, even pleasant. Young, mid-thirties, I guessed. He spoke mellifluous English. But I wasn't reassured, for in his hand he casually held a Loyola University business card. One of mine. He must have gotten it from some shopkeeper in the bazaar, who'd decided to play informer after talking with me. Not reassuring. I braced myself for a long night of interrogation. What had I done wrong? How unpleasant would this get?

In the car the SSP made light talk about tourism in Ladakh. Had I seen the old palace? Unfortunate, really, that I was here too early in the season to see any matches on the polo grounds. Extraordinarily fine polo here in Leh, come high summer. But Officer Singh said nothing to explain why he wanted to chat with me, and I didn't dare ask. Best to act casual, I told myself.

We drove through the bazaar, turned right at its south end, then left through the gates of a high-walled compound. Police headquarters.

Briskly Officer Singh led me through the barracks. Policemen stood to attention as we passed. We crossed a courtyard and came to a handsome bungalow. "Officers' quarters," he explained.

And here something very strange happened. Two young children dashed out, laughing, demanding to be picked up. "My little boy and little girl," he said proudly. In the parlor I was introduced to his wife.

"Would you care for a Gibson?" I nodded, confused. I'd been readying myself for a police grilling, and here I was being treated like a family guest.

The gin and vermouth appeared. We touched glasses. "Pretzels, peanuts, help yourself."

We drank in silence. The children clambered noisily over his lap. I allowed myself to begin to relax.

"So." V. K. Singh put down his drink, clapped his hands. "And now," he announced, "I have something in the other room I have to show you. Something important. I cannot let you leave here until I have your reaction to it."

I started to rise. "No, no, sit there. I will bring it to you. I must have your reaction." He strode into the next room.

I tensed up again. Was this to be an elaborate test of some kind? Was this some devious way of interrogating a nosy foreigner who had been too inquisitive on his way through the bazaar asking unauthorized questions about communal politics?

The Senior Superintendent of Police returned with a covered cardboard box. Shooing away the children, he placed it on the table before me. Suddenly he was more serious, formal. "Now," he said, "everything depends on your reaction to the contents within."

He watched me study the box. "Go ahead," he urged quietly. "Just open it."

I lifted the lid. Inside was a typed manuscript, with handwritten jottings in the margins. "Go ahead," he repeated. "Just take a peek."

Some one hundred and fifty pages. "Yours?" I asked.

"My own work." His eyes shone. "I've been working on this for years."

I leafed through the sheets. References to Gibbon, Hume, Spencer. Criticisms of traditional understandings of religion and scripture. Sir James Frazer, E. B. Tylor, Darwin, Freud.

This, explained V. K. Singh, was his personal magnum opus, a treatise on the need for a revived and truly secular worldview in today's India. "It synthesizes a great deal, as you can see at a glance."

"And this was why you brought me to the barracks?"

"Of course. Up here in the mountains, I have no one to share my intellectual thoughts with. Months and months at a time in this out-of-the-way station." He wrote, he said, in intellectual solitude. "But then my security people brought me your card, and I saw that we have a visitor who's an assistant professor of theology. A professor of theology, here in my station, while I'm writing my treatise! So, you see, I really had to hunt you down. And now"—another clap of the hands—"there's just time to read the first chapter together before dinner. Would you care for another drink?"

Yes, I told him, feeling a bit wrung-out. A nice stiff drink, after a very long day.

"OUR HEARTS ARE FULL": LADAKHI SHIA RESPONSES TO THE HORSE OF KARBALA PROCESSION

This encounter with Leh's SSP was interesting in itself; but it also led to a conversation that offered me another perspective on Muharram in India. On my second visit to the barracks (this time with much less nervousness on my part), V. K. Singh showed me his personal library. I was struck by the large number of memoirs by British officers of the old Indian Civil Service (ICS). V. K. (as he asked me to call him) was much impressed with the Raj's ICS. He picked up a copy of Philip Mason's two-volume set, *The Guardians of India*. "I've learned a great deal from works like this." As an educated man and a self-described "thoroughly secularized Hindu" he thought himself well-placed to mediate in communal politics between local Buddhists and Muslims.

Before this, V. K. said, he'd been stationed in Kashmir, where he borrowed a leaf from the Britishers and cultivated good relations with village elders at every site to which he'd been assigned. "I'd make a point of walking with them in the evenings, asking them their concerns." As long as he could find some local elder willing to take responsibility and guarantee responsible behavior, he said, he was always happy to authorize Muharram processions in a given village. "Use minimum force. Delegate as much as possible," was his summary of what he had learned from the ICS memoirs on his shelf.

And V. K. helped me with introductions in town. Whether out of genuine curiosity or out of a security professional's concern to keep an eye on foreign snoopers (perhaps a mixture of both), he took an interest in my Muharram research and helped arrange meetings with various Shia notables in Leh district.

Among the first Shias I interviewed in Leh were Ghulam Husain, president of the Anjuman-e Imamia (the local Shia association, about which more is said in a subsequent chapter) and Mohammed Ali Rahi, manager of the Hotel Khayul on Old Fort Road. In 1995 and again in 1996 I met with them for conversations on the hotel's front porch.

In May 1996 I chatted with Ghulam Husain and Mohammed Ali on the topic of Zuljenah and what the horse's presence in the Ashura procession meant to them as Shia Muslims. The conversation began in English but at a certain point (as will be indicated) switched to Urdu. The following is from my journal entry for that day:

> Mohammed Ali and two younger Shias who have joined us on the veranda want very much to discuss what Zuljenah means to the Shias, and why the horse is venerated. Mohammed Ali lingers on this subject for over half an hour, illustrating his points with various anecdotes. The other two men take a keen interest and join in with exclamations, nods, and comments occasionally interjected in Balti.
>
> M. Ali states that Zuljenah is important because "we have faith that Husain was on Zuljenah, that Zuljenah was alone with Husain on the battlefield, was a witness to his death and was the last creature to see him alive. Also Zuljenah brought the news of Husain's death to Zaynab [Husain's sister]. When Zuljenah comes back with an empty saddle, we know that Husain is dead." (My informant's use of the present tense is interesting. He seems to alternate between describing a long-past historical event and visualizing a present-day ritual enactment. Of course this is one of the things accomplished by ritual: it breaks down the barrier between past and present. Leh's riderless Horse of Karbala makes fresh the death of Husain.)
>
> M. Ali again: "Zuljenah knows what happened to Husain."
>
> So eager is M. Ali to explain what Zuljenah means to him that his words rush out in a tumble.
>
> "Just as Buddhists go to temple and pray before statues and do this [he makes a prostration-bob, hands folded in front]: well, we have feelings for Zuljenah which are like that. Only not exactly," he goes on to explain, hurriedly, "because we know the horse is not God. We have feelings."
>
> I tell him I'm not sure I understand what he's trying to say.
>
> To explain what he means here he switches to Urdu. "Our hearts are full, and we feel sad feelings when we see the horse because we know Imam Husain has died."

> On Ashura, M. Ali says, in front of the Jami Masjid, Sheikh Mirza will give a *hadees* (speech or sermon) concerning Zuljenah: why Zuljenah is with us. The horse then goes down the main bazaar and is taken inside the *matam-serai*.

I asked Mohammed Ali, Ghulam Husain, and other Shia Muharram participants about the historical origins of Leh's Zuljenah procession. The consensus was that Leh's Shias brought the practice with them when they immigrated from Baltistan, a region located in what today comprises the mountainous "Northern Areas" of Pakistan. Ursula Sagaster's observations of the 1989 Muharram season in the Balti town of Skardu confirms that Zuljenah continues to have an important role in Baltistan's Ashura processions today.[4]

Worth noting are the major denominational and ethnic labels that are applied to the Muslim populations of Leh: not only "Sunni" and "Shia," but also "Arghun," "Khache," and "Balti." Gérard Rovillé identifies the Arghuns as being "of Kashmiri-Ladakhi origin . . . generally urban merchants."[5] John Crook's recent study of Ladakhi politics identifies the Arghuns as the product of "marriages between Muslims and Buddhists," and he goes on to make the following observation, "The laws of Islam ensure that such families remain Muslim and reconversion to Buddhism is not tolerated."[6] The Khache are "Lhasa Muslims," descended from Kashmiri businessmen who intermarried with the local population in Tibet. While in Ladakh I met several Lhasa Muslims who are proprietors of curio shops in Leh bazaar. Most Arghuns and Khaches are Sunni Muslims. The term Balti identifies Shias whose origins are traced to Pakistan's Northern Areas, as distinguished from those Shias whose families first came from Kashmir or elsewhere. Crook's study draws attention to the poverty and low social status of most Balti Shias in Leh.[7]

Crook also notes the presence of numerous Kashmiri entrepreneurs (most of them Sunni) who have come to Leh only recently, chiefly since 1974, when the region was first opened to tourism.[8] They are less assimilated than the long-settled Arghuns. These new arrivals have families back in Kashmir; many of them commute seasonally between Srinagar and Leh, to take advantage of the presence of tourists in Ladakh. Their success in Leh's hotel and trekking industry has been resented by many Ladakhi Buddhists, as is described in the next chapter.

I met individual Shias in Ladakh from varied backgrounds, including Uttar Pradesh, Jammu, and Kashmir; but the most conspicuous of Ladakh's Shias are the Baltis. Their presence can be traced back to the early seven-

teenth century, when Ali Mir Sher Khan, the Muslim sultan of Skardu, defeated in battle the Ladakhi army of the Buddhist king Jamyang Namgyal. King Jamyang was captured and made a prisoner at Ali Mir's Balti capital, Skardu. Janet Rizvi tells the story of the startling turn of events that followed: "It must have seemed that Buddhism was about to suffer the same eclipse in Ladakh as it had in the neighbouring countries to the west and north. However . . . Jamyang was restored to his throne, though only on condition of marrying one of Ali Mir's daughters . . . the Balti princess, Gyal Katun. . . If this was intended as an expedient to insinuate Islam into Ladakh peacefully from the top, it was singularly unsuccessful. The Ladakhis reconciled themselves to their new queen by recognizing in her an incarnation of the Buddhist goddess, the White Tara—an ingenious way of turning the tables on the monotheists."[9]

Tara is revered as the consort of Avalokiteshvara; in Buddhist legend she is said to have been born from the tears shed by this Bodhisattva of infinite compassion. In his *History of Western Tibet* (first published in 1907), the Christian missionary and scholar A. H. Francke observed dryly of the Gyal Katun incident, "It was rather startling that the White Tara should have chosen the body of a Mohammedan girl for an incarnation."[10] But Francke does not give the Ladakhi Buddhists the credit they deserve. Their use of myth rescued Buddhism from defeat.

The significance of Gyal Katun's marriage to the Buddhist king of Ladakh is also reflected in traditions to the effect that Ladakh's version of the game of polo and certain forms of Ladakhi music were brought from Baltistan at the time of her move from Skardu to Ladakh.[11]

SOURCES FOR THE EARLY HISTORY OF ZULJENAH RITUALS

I mentioned earlier that Leh's Shias trace their Zuljenah rituals to Baltistan. In the following chapter I discuss in greater detail Ladakhi Muharram liturgies linked to the Horse of Karbala. Here I provide a larger context for Ladakhi observances by examining historical evidence and classical Shia devotional literature (Arabic, Persian, and Urdu) for references to Zuljenah veneration, in Iran and elsewhere in the Islamic world, in the premodern period.

In a review of Iranian mourning practices, J. Calmard remarks on the use of horses in funerary processions in the pre-Islamic period.[12] Henri Massé, in a folklore study entitled *Croyances et coutumes persanes* ("Iranian

Beliefs and Customs"), notes the persistence into the nineteenth century of processions in Iran featuring riderless horses to honor members of the nobility at their death. "The deceased's favorite horse would be led forth," reports Massé, "very well caparisoned. From its saddle would be suspended the dead man's weapons and his copy of the Qur'an."[13] Such ancient funerary practices honoring the nobility may well have influenced the form of Shia commemorative rituals honoring Husain, the slain warrior Imam. As is seen in the next chapter, the Iranian practice of having the deceased's horse bear the text of the Qur'an is paralleled in Ladakh's present-day Ashura liturgies.

Massé gathers together early European travelers' accounts of Muharram processions in Iran: Tavernier in Isfahan, A.D.1667; Adam Olearius in Ardebil, 1676; LeBrun in Isfahan, 1704; and Morier in Teheran, 1810-1816. These witnesses describe Ashura processions in which riderless horses representing the Karbala martyrs were led through the streets. The animals were sometimes marked with make-believe wounds; their saddlecloths and surcoats would be pierced with arrows.[14]

Massé summarizes an interesting account by an Englishman named S. G. Wilson, who witnessed a Zuljenah procession in Tabriz late in the nineteenth century. Wilson notes the presence of a horse bearing on its back two white pigeons. These birds were meant to recall a medieval legend to the effect that two doves flew over Karbala the day Husain died and witnessed his martyrdom. Descending to the battlefield, they dipped their wings in his blood and flew to Mecca and Medina. The blood dripping from their wings, so the legend goes, alerted the inhabitants of the holy cities that the Prophet's grandson had been killed. I draw attention to this account because the legend is also reflected in present-day Ashura rituals in Ladakh, as is discussed in the next chapter.[15]

Worth noting here is that Massé's European sources also speak of flagellants and other mourners who cut themselves with knives and shed their own blood in the public Ashura processions. In this context Massé cites Étienne Kakasch (who reports on Muharram practices in Azerbaijan, A.D.1602), Olearius (Ardebil, 1676), and Wilson (Tabriz, 1896). Massé goes on to speculate that the ritual of Muharram flagellation may have been transmitted from Azerbaijan and the Caucasus to southern Iran, sometime in the nineteenth century. Turks, perhaps Qaraquyunlu Shias, says Massé, may have been the ones to disseminate this practice.[16]

Of greater interest to me is that Massé's sources demonstrate that the Muharram ritual of bloody *matam* in honor of the Karbala martyrs has been practiced for at least four hundred years. To this can be added the evidence

cited by the German scholar Heinz Halm, who describes Shia lamentation rituals for Husain in tenth-century Baghdad.[17] This is worth knowing, since I have occasionally encountered Sunni Muslims of strong anti-Shia bias who, out of a conviction that *matam* is nothing more than *bid'ah* (a term referring to heretical innovations in religious practice, innovations finding no warrant in the *sunnah* or exemplary behavior of the Prophet Muhammad's lifestyle), claim that *matam* is a practice that dates back only a century.

DEVOTION AND POLEMICS: REFERENCES TO THE HORSE OF KARBALA IN SHIA LITERATURE FROM THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

Devotional literature from the Shia tradition provides additional evidence for lamentation practices honoring Husain, especially with regard to the Horse of Karbala. Consider the *Rawdat al-shuhada'* ("The Garden of Martyrs"), a Persian-language work celebrating Husain and the other heroes of Karbala (I have referred to this text in previous chapters). Authored by Husain Wa'iz al-Kashifi (d. A.D. 1504), the *Garden* became incorporated into Shia commemorations of the martyrs as a text to be read aloud in Muharram gatherings. Like many Arabic and Persian literary works that are oriented toward public oral recitation, the *Garden* is characterized by a style that combines prose narrative with passages of poetic verse. The poems comment on and highlight the emotional force of the events described in the prose text.[18]

In the section on the battlefield death of the Imam Husain, Kashifi evokes the anguish felt by Husain's sister Zaynab and the other women of the Imam's household, who were left in the besieged encampment while Husain galloped away on Zuljenah to confront the soldiers of Yazid. The Imam disappeared from view as he charged among the enemy ranks; the women did not know what had become of him. Husain fell from his horse and was killed; and after his death Zuljenah ran directionless about the battlefield. Thereafter, Kashifi tells us:

> Its mane stained with the blood of that worthy man, tears streaming from its eyes, it headed toward the tent of Imam Husain. As for the women of the Imam's household: when they saw it approaching with a bloodstained face, and that its rider was not to be seen, a cry rose up from their very hearts.

> They began to speak to the mount: "O Zuljenah, what have you done with the Imam? Since you took him away, why didn't you bring him back? You took care to leave him in the midst of his enemies, but you left without him to return to his camp."
>
> [According to Kashifi, they then cry out in verse:]
>
> What have you done to Islam, O Lord?
> What have you done to the King of Kings of all time?
> What dust is this, O horse, upon your face?
> Your head is wounded, your mane streaked with blood.
>
> [Kashifi continues:]
>
> They began making lamentations. Zuljenah lowered its head, and teardrops fell from its eyes. It rubbed its face against the feet of Imam Zayn al-Abidin [Husain's surviving son, who became the new spiritual leader of the Shias upon Husain's death].
>
> Abu al-Mu'ayyad al-Khwarizmi has recorded a tradition to the effect that this horse beat its head against the earth [in grief] so many times that it died. Abu al-Mufakhir has said that it went towards the desert; and no one has any further information about it.[19]

"This horse beat its head against the earth": a significant gesture. Zuljenah, in Kashifi's telling, itself engaged in the act of *matam*. Characters from the Karbala drama perform paradigmatic actions: if even Husain's horse struck itself in grief, so, too, should we who hear the story. Zuljenah's *matam* also reflects Shia legends to the effect that Husain's martyrdom was an event of such cosmic significance that even members of the animal world and angelic kingdom lamented the death of the Imam.[20]

This notion of the horse's paradigmatic sorrow is reinforced by Kashifi's assertion, "Teardrops fell from its eyes." Zuljenah understood what had happened to its master and wept for that reason. Again and again in my Ladakhi fieldwork Shia informants insisted that the *shabih-e Zuljenah* ("the likeness of Zuljenah," that is, the horse chosen to represent Husain's mount in the annual Ashura procession) understands the meaning of the tragedy it helps commemorate. For this reason, I was told, the horse sometimes weeps during the procession, not because of its own distress at being led through agitated crowds and ranks of bloody flagellants—as a cynic might claim—but out of sympathetic solidarity with the Karbala martyrs. Some modern-

day paintings of Zuljenah show the arrow-pierced horse standing on the battlefield, tears of grief streaming from its eyes.[21]

Another example of devotional literature concerning the Horse of Karbala appears in the following verses of Arabic poetry included by Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (d. 1698) in his work *Bihar al-anwar* ("The Oceans of Lights"):

> And the horse came from the battlefield, deprived of its rider,
> announcing the death of Husain, shying with fright.
> Dyed with the blood of Husain, it ran towards the tents,
> its saddle pulled awry.
> Zaynab said, "O Sakina, Husain's horse has come.
> Look, behold its condition!"
> Sakina stood up, saw the horse as it whinnied,
> as it flung about its reins; then she wailed a great cry.
> Weeping, she said, "Oh, the malicious joy of those who have envied me!
> My aunt Zaynab! They have killed Husain and orphaned his children."
> And the stallion drew near, stained with the martyr's blood;
> its tears trickled down to the ground.
> When the pure women heard Sakina
> announce Husain's death and cry aloud,
> they let forth screams from the women's quarters of the tents,
> bewailing Muhammad's favorite grandson.
> Scratching their own faces and slapping their cheeks,
> they let fall their veils and howled forth their grief.[22]

The poet achieves the effect of pathos by visualizing Zuljenah's encounter with Sakina, Husain's four-year-old daughter. It is through the presence of the bloodstained riderless horse that the girl realizes that her father is dead. Zuljenah's appearance makes Sakina cry, which in turn triggers the women's outburst. The riderless stallion is a messenger of death.

The women's grief described in the poem above parallels the emotional outpouring that is triggered today via ritual in Ladakh's annual Horse of Karbala procession. As my Shia informants (cited earlier) told me in the town of Leh, "Our hearts are full, and we feel sad feelings when we see the horse because we know Imam Husain has died."

Zuljenah continues to figure in modern-day lamentation poetry in the Shia tradition. The following is an Urdu *nauha* from a chapbook I purchased in 1991 in Pakistan. I bought it from a vendor selling devotional pamphlets at the entrance to Karbala Gamay-Shah, one of Lahore's most important

Shia shrines. In the text the otherwise anonymous poet identifies himself by the name Javeed:

> When the Winged One, Zuljenah, returned riderless
> from the battlefield to the tents,
> Every weeping eye looked about for the master.
>
> At the final hour the horse took this message from the battlefield:
> "The *Umma*, the members of Husain's own faith,
> have thrown down and trampled on the living image of the Prophet!"
>
> It rubs on its own forehead
> this blood of the Martyr of Sorrow
> and cries out in anguish: "O Lord of the Two Worlds!"
>
> The whole body of this mute creature
> is wounded by arrows.
> Against him, too, the tyrants have directed their violent impulse.
>
> "Where is my father?
> Say something, O horse of the holy warrior!"
> She asks this, crying, the girl who once slept at the parent's breast.
>
> Overwhelmed by his wounds,
> the master fell from the saddle.
> The horse had sustained this treasure bestowed by Fatima on the world.
>
> This is the Buraq of Karbala, on which the Shah mounted.
> The king permitted his own head to be cut off
> and then soared forth in a *mi'raj*, a heavenly flight,
> like that once attained by the Prophet.
>
> The animal's ability to recognize truth
> is greater than man's.
> At Karbala, Zuljenah's conduct is exemplary.
>
> Why shouldn't Faithfulness now kiss the feet of this horse?
> The mute poet Javeed has received blessings from those in sorrow,
> from the Karbala Martyrs.[23]

Two features of this poem are especially noteworthy. The first involves the poet's reference to Zuljenah as the "Buraq of Karbala." Buraq was the mythical winged creature which (according to popular Islamic legend) was ridden by the Prophet Muhammad on his *mi'raj* (the ascension to heaven, referred to in the Qur'an, chapter 17, verse 1). Shia devotionalism makes frequent reference to the intimate warmth and closeness shared by the Prophet and his grandson. Here the poet highlights this closeness by suggesting that Husain's actions imitated those of his grandfather: just as Buraq bore the Prophet in the *mi'raj*, so, too, did Zuljenah bear the Imam in the battle that led him to Paradise.

The second feature I wish to examine involves the *takhallos* or signature-closing at the poem's end, where the poet inserts his own name into the text. As remarked in a previous chapter, this is a device familiar from classical Persian poetry. Yet note that the poet describes himself as "mute" (*be-zaban*). At first this can be taken as a conventional show of modesty and self-abasement: good poets, after all, should be anything but mute. But then return to stanza four and observe that Zuljenah, too, is referred to as *be-zaban*. So the poet is assimilating himself to the status of Husain's horse. Like the Horse of Karbala, Javeed implies, he, too, is wounded and in sorrow. And like the horse he, too, despite his creaturely limitations, will do what he can to convey the tragic truth of Husain's martyrdom.

In May 1996 I visited the Ladakhi village of Thikse, located in Leh district. Thikse is known to tourists primarily for its Buddhist population and its famous *gompa* or monastery; but it also has a *matam-serai* and a Shia population. While in Thikse I made the acquaintance of Akhund Fidai Husain, a member of the Imamia Youth Federation Leh, who enjoys a reputation as one of the best poets and *nauha* reciters in the region. Generously he translated for me a poem about Zuljenah which, he told me, would be recited that year on Ashura by members of the Youth Federation. The poem, he said, would be chanted in the presence of the *shabih-e Zuljenah* (the horse chosen to represent Husain's stallion in the annual procession) and would be addressed directly to the horse. This *nauha* would be performed in the courtyard of the so-called Balti Masjid (Leh township's principal Shia mosque), shortly before the start of the procession, while the horse was being caparisoned.

The original text of this poem is in Balti (the term used by local Shias to describe the form of Ladakhi spoken by Muslims). Akhund Fidai Husain selected this poem from a Balti *nauha* anthology published in Kargil in 1972. He translated the text into Urdu; I then translated it into English. When

Fidai Husain first read me the poem, he introduced it by saying, "This is Hazrat Zaynab complaining to Zuljenah about her brother's death":

When afternoon arrived,
the celestial sun of the faith became lost.
After Zuljenah became separated from its master,
it came to the tent's entrance.

With a heart full of sorrow,
Zaynab came out of the tent.
She cried out, putting her face
to the stirrup.

She began to speak to Zuljenah
with this complaint:
Alas, that you have abandoned
my brother!

O horse, so spattered with blood,
has martyrdom befallen my brother,
king of Kauthar [the stream that is believed to flow through Paradise],
who was thirsty and exhausted?

My brother, with a body
like that of the heavens,
has fallen asleep with wounds
more numerous than the stars.

Has the lamp of the faith been extinguished
on the field of Karbala?
And what kind of tyrant has won victory
and made the world blind?

Alas I, along with the orphans,
have fallen into the enemy's captivity.
And it has become my lot to remain weeping
in the darkness of sorrow.[24]

The figure of Zuljenah also appears in another genre of literature: polemics written to defend Shia practices against criticism by Sunni Mus-

lims. An example of the genre is an English-language book entitled *Shiaism Explained,* an anonymous work published in Karachi in 1972. Since Zuljenah veneration is frequently denounced as idolatry, the discussion of rituals related to the Horse of Karbala is reserved for a chapter called "Sanction for Making Images." The anonymous author begins by quoting a scriptural verse concerning Solomon, the Biblical king and Islamic prophet, who in the Qur'an (chapter 34, verses 12-13) is said to have commanded the genies under his dominion to make for him buildings, reservoirs, and statues. The author then proceeds by way of a syllogism. Solomon and Muhammad both upheld *tawhid* (the assertion of God's oneness) and both preached the same prophetic message; image-making did not displease Solomon (per the Qur'anic passage cited above); therefore image-making did not displease Muhammad, nor does it violate *tawhid.* The author goes on to note that Muhammad smiled and did not disapprove when he discovered dolls and a toy horse in the possession of his wife Ayesha (who was still a girl at the time of her marriage).[25]

"It will be remembered," our author says, "that there is a clear distinction between the idols whose worshippers are called polytheist, and the statues which are not worshipped by their makers and their making is not, therefore, in any way against the ideal of Tauheed (Unity of God)." Given that the Prophet's *sunnah* is exemplary, any action of which he did not disapprove is therefore permissible for Muslims.[26]

The author of *Shiaism Explained* then extends the argument to the *shabih-e Zuljenah,* "the likeness of Zuljenah," which is venerated in Muharram processions on Ashura. The presence of the *shabih* is only a "memorial" of Husain's valiant action of riding into combat at Karbala. Kissing or garlanding the horse is not idolatry but only a gesture of love for the person memorialized by the *shabih.*[27]

As a side note our anonymous author diverges from his discussion of *shabih* veneration to deal with another Sunni objection to Shia Muharram practices: "naming the ladies of the Holy Household" in the prayers and invocations that occur during *majlis* gatherings, which in the minds of some critics is a violation of women's modesty. But, replies our author, "The name of these respectable ladies . . . comes to the lips of the mourners of Imam Husain when they recall to memory . . . the tragedy of Karbala." Again, the polemicist emphasizes the intention underlying the ritual action: memory, commemoration, the linking of present and past, rather than the violation of codes of modesty and worship.[28]

Our author concludes his discussion by characterizing Shia ritual practices as "quite inevitable for those who have deep love for *Ahle Bait* [the

Prophet Muhammad's family]. Those who accuse them of going beyond limits should ponder that their grief is limitless and knows no bounds. It should, therefore, be seen with the eyes of true lovers and not with the eyes of lame critics."[29]

This passage, I believe, goes to the heart of Shias' self-definition as "true lovers" of the Prophet's family, who surpass all other Muslims in the communal display of this love (I develop this point in chapter seven). The sentiment is reflected in the defiant show of emotion displayed in Javeed's Zuljenah poem cited above: "Why shouldn't Faithfulness now kiss the feet of this horse?"

Underlying Zuljenah polemics in South Asia is a tension between Sunni partisans attracted to the fiercely aniconic Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia and Shia apologists striving to rationalize the philiconic exuberance of popular Islam in India. A common polemical approach among such Shia apologists is to appeal to sources that their Sunni critics cannot possibly question. In the instance quoted above, the Shia author employs passages from Qur'anic scripture and a *hadith* reference to Ayesha (who is generally not held in high esteem by Shias because of her enmity for Husain's father Ali but who is widely revered by Sunnis as the Prophet Muhammad's favorite wife).

Another Shia polemical work, this one published in Lahore in 1976, defends veneration of the *shabih-e Zuljenah* by appealing to Islamic scripture. The author, Ghulam Husain Najafi, begins by quoting the first verses of chapter 100 of the Qur'an:

> By the horses that gallop snorting to battle,
> That strike forth sparks with their hooves,
> And launch the attack at dawn,
> Stirring the dust as they charge.

> In these Qur'anic verses [asserts Najafi] the Lord—may He be exalted!—has described the majesty of those warriors and horses who consecrate themselves to holy war and go forth to the battlefield of jihad. It seems that when a warrior on jihad's battlefield is praised, then it is also pleasing to God that there be remembrance of the warrior's horse along with the warrior himself.
>
> On the day of Ashura, Shias remember those holy warriors who engaged in jihad against the injustice of the Banu Umayyah on the field of Karbala. So, together with the commemoration of these persons, the faithful also commemorate those horses who on the battlefield of

> Karbala suffered from thirst and hunger and who, on the field of war, in the manner of holy warriors, were struck by arrows and lances.
>
> O friends of justice! On Ashura the likeness of the horse is a representation of the Karbala martyrs who suffered as innocent victims of oppression. It is permissible, and not a sin, to set up a likeness for the sake of establishing the remembrance of a solemn tragedy.[30]

Thus both of the Shia authors cited above justify Zuljenah veneration by appealing to the authority of Qur'anic scripture.

POSTER ART AND SOUTH ASIAN SHIA PIETY

Important sources for understanding popular piety among Shia communities in India can be found in the printed color posters for sale at vendors' stalls near the entrance to Muslim shrines. In Delhi in 1989 and 1991, at the Sufi pilgrimage site of Hazrat Nizam al-Din Awliya, I bought a number of posters showing scenes from the tragedy of Karbala. They are inexpensive enough to be affordable for a wide range of consumers. I have seen examples of such posters on display in private homes and shopkeepers' kiosks in Hyderabad, Calcutta, and Lucknow. Several posters linked to the topics discussed in the present chapter are represented in the illustrations grouped at the front of this book. I discuss four of them here.

The first poster is a map of Karbala marking important sites and events related to the battle. Clearly shown are the encampments of the martyrs and Yazid's troops as well as the river Euphrates. Blooming roses labeled with Arabic titles dominate the lower portion of the poster; each rose symbolizes a martyr who was killed or taken prisoner in battle. Also shown are small pictures—an arrow-pierced flask, a galloping riderless horse—suggestive of narratives linked to Ashura: the death of Abbas as he brought water for Sakina, the return of Zuljenah to the women's tents after Husain's death. The presence of such pictures makes me suspect that this poster is a schematized version of the wall-size illustrated storytellers' banners once commonly found in Iranian settings. During Muharram professional reciters would use such banners as a visual aid, pointing to scenes on the banner as they advanced through the narrative.[31]

My second example of poster art shows a background comprising two juxtaposed scenes: the battlefield of Karbala and the shrines of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The scenes are linked by the foreground illustration: two doves, their wings dripping blood. As described above in the discussion

of Ashura processions, these doves are said to have flown to Arabia to convey the news of Husain's martyrdom.[32]

In a discussion of Iranian poster art inspired by the Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 Islamic revolution, Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi insist on the multivalent and open-ended quality of the symbols in Shia iconography.[33] This is a quality that is reflected, I believe, in my last two examples of poster art from India.

Both show Zuljenah. The first seems to me to offer the more conventional iconography. The horse stands motionless on the battlefield, the blood from its wounds running down its legs into the sands of Karbala. In the background, the martyrs' tents are afire. The Euphrates is dark with blood.

The second of the two Zuljenah posters offers an interesting variation on this theme. The horse stands bleeding and arrow-pierced, as in the other picture, but the earth around its hooves blooms with flowers. The desert has been transformed, reborn. The background does not show flames or images of defeat, but instead mountains, pavilions, a garden setting.

I bought this poster in 1991. When I returned to New York (where I was teaching at the time), I showed it to Shia acquaintances (all of them first-generation immigrants from India and Pakistan) and asked them what the poster conveyed to them. One pointed to the blood trickling down the horse's legs and to the desert blooming with flowers and said that these things show that the blood of Husain has the power to save (thus demonstrating, although he did not say this, his grasp of the picture's symbolism: Zuljenah's blood represents the blood of Husain). He then went on to summarize for me the doctrine of *shafa'ah* (intercession).

Another informant said that the flowers and pavilions symbolize the Paradise promised in the Qur'an to believers. A third informant agreed with the notion of Paradise imagery but added a further comment. The mountains suggest coolness, he said, after the thirst of Karbala. Relief from intense desert heat is a quality of Paradise. And the way such paradisial happiness is conveyed in this poster, he maintained, is through imagery linked to Kashmir.

"Not today's Kashmir," he quickly added, "violence and communal hatreds, and so on"; but an older Kashmir. I understood what he meant: the Kashmir of the Moghuls, Shalimar and Dal Lake, pleasure-domed summer resorts, Thomas Moore's dreamy *Lalla Rookh*: "If there be an Elysium on earth, it is this, it is this." All vanished, for now at least, but still captured as a hoped-for vision in this poster of the Horse of Karbala.[34]

SEVEN

Muslim-Buddhist Relations in a Ritual Context: An Analysis of the Muharram Procession in Leh Township, Ladakh

INTRODUCTION: "A FAR PLEASANTER LAND TO TRAVEL IN . . ."

In 1891, as part of a visit to the northernmost borders of the Indian Empire, the newspaper reporter E. F. Knight traveled through Kashmir and then spent time in "the mystic land of Ladak." In Knight's account of his travels, *Where Three Empires Meet,* he describes his first encounter with Ladakhis. He makes clear which land and which population he prefers:

> These men did not jabber and lie, fawn and smile falsely, after the manner of a Kashmiri who is trying to sell something . . . One comes to like these amiable Ladaki Buddhists; they are highly spoken of by all who have travelled in their country, as being truthful, honest, hospitable, and straightforward. They are a harmless, simple race, with none of the narrow bigotry and caste prejudices which draw so impassable a chasm between the peoples of India holding other creeds and ourselves . . . All this makes Ladak a far pleasanter land to travel in than either a Hindoo or a Mahomedan country, with their barriers of reserve and seclusion, which make it so extremely difficult for the stranger to acquire any but the most superficial knowledge of the natives. The Ladaki, on the other hand, will welcome one to his house,

> admit one into his most sacred buildings, and allow one to be present at any of his religious ceremonies, concealing nothing, and ready to give any explanation tht is required of him.
>
> Following a religion that never persecutes, he is very tolerant to other creeds, though he adheres firmly to his own.[1]

European travelers have also contrasted Kashmiri Islam and Ladakhi Buddhism by commenting unfavorably on Islamic dogmatism. Major Gompertz of the Indian Army, whom we met last chapter trekking with his fox terriers from Srinagar to Leh, attributed the following speech to his Kashmiri Muslim guide, Habib:

> "This is Kufristan," said he to me sententiously one night, waving his hand comprehensively and contemptuously over the hills of Ladakh spread about us in the moonlight. This in English means "the land of the pagan."
>
> "People of evil customs also," he continued, "for they drink wine and one woman marries many men."
>
> Why the polyandry of the Ladakhi should be evil, and the polygamy of the Muhammadan virtuous, it was, of course, no use discussing. The obvious retort would have been that the latter was the injunction of Muhammad, who was the shadow of God. And when you reach that point in an argument there is nothing further to be said. Which reminds me of an aged Musalman teacher of Urdu with whom I once worked at the language, who held strongly that the fossils in the rocks were put there by the devil to delude men into thinking that the world was older than Muhammad had taught.[2]

Most outsiders who visit Ladakh, as nearly as I can tell, are fascinated by the region's Buddhism but show relatively little interest in or appreciation for its Islamic culture. This seems to hold true also for some scholars who do research in the region. I recently attended a conference on the topic of South Asian studies, where I presented a paper on Ladakhi Shia ritual. At the conference I was approached by a European scholar, a Buddhologist, who knew of my research specialty. Bitterly he complained to me of what he described as poorly thought-out educational innovations instigated by the present government of India, whereby "hordes" of Muslim teachers from Kashmir have come to Ladakh to educate local children and implement curricular reforms. "Ladakh," he asserted, "is a living museum of Buddhism." According to him, bringing in outsiders—specifically,

Kashmiri Muslims—as teachers is leading to the dilution of Ladakh's Buddhist cultural heritage.

My colleague's complaint is echoed in a 1993 article written for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* by a Hong Kong-based journalist named Adrienne Mong. Entitled "Endangered Culture: Ladakh's Buddhists Find Themselves Swamped by Muslim Influx," the piece states that "a well-meaning scheme to reform the education system to create more skilled workers has resulted in an influx of hundreds of young Muslim teachers from Kashmir, who chip away at Ladakhi tradition by imposing their value system on children from an intrinsically different culture."[3]

As will be seen below, in recent years members of the Ladakh Buddhist Association have used the save-our-children cry to stigmatize Islamic culture as foreign and essentialize Buddhism as the authentically indigenous culture of Ladakh.

Every traveler brings his own bias to a new land. Given my own training as an Arabist, I have been inclined to extend a particular sympathy to Ladakh's Muslim population. In this chapter I will use Leh township's Zuljenah procession as a way to talk about relations between Ladakh's Muslim and Buddhist populations. I hope to demonstrate that Ladakhi communal relations should not be dichotomized along bipolar Muslim-Buddhist lines, but rather that the Zuljenah procession both masks and displays Shia-Sunni tensions within Leh district's Islamic community. At the same time, I will argue, the Horse of Karbala ritual presents a show of monolithic Muslim solidarity for the benefit of Buddhist onlookers.

"A MULTITUDE OF THE LOVERS OF THE FAMILY OF THE PROPHET": THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR LADAKH'S MUHARRAM RITUALS

In previous chapters I have described the historical events commemorated annually by Shias during the month of Muharram: how the Imam Husain withstood Yazid's forces at Karbala, all the while suffering torments of thirst under the desert sun; how Husain allowed himself to be killed rather than surrender; how the surviving women and children of his family were subjected to humiliations by their captors and taken as prisoners to Yazid's court in Damascus.

Sunni and Shia alike agree on the sequence of events outlined above. More controversial is the interpretation to which these events have been subjected. In brief, Shia theology can be said to emphasize the following

aspects of Karbala: the necessity of Husain's death as part of the divine economy of salvation; foreknowledge concerning Karbala on the part of *Ahl-e Bayt* (the members of the family of the Prophet); Husain's voluntary acquiescence in his own death; God's granting to Husain of the gift of intercession on behalf of sinners, as a reward for his sufferings at Karbala; and the possibility of access to this intercessory grace by those who remember the suffering of the Karbala martyrs today.[4]

Shia theodicy argued for the necessity of Karbala. The sorrows undergone by *Ahl-e Bayt*, especially Husain and his descendants the Imams, enabled them to acquire intercessory powers that may be exercised on Judgment Day on behalf of the community of the faithful. Participants gain access to this intercession through the practice of liturgical remembrance during the Muharram season. This act of commemoration focuses on lamentation for the Karbala martyrs, a lamentation which is to be expressed in the most active physical manner possible: the shedding of tears, groans and loud weeping, repeated breast-beating and other more extreme forms of self-mortification. These lamentation actions are known collectively as *matam*, "gestures of mourning," and are widely accepted by Shias as essential to any Muharram liturgy. The sixteenth-century Qur'an commentator Husain Wa'iz al-Kashifi, in the introduction to his Persian-language devotional work *Rawdat al-shuhada'* ("The Garden of the Martyrs") explains as follows the importance of physically manifested emotional involvement in the communal remembrance of Husain:

> Weeping as one performs gestures of mourning pleases God and is the means by which one attains the Gardens of Eternity. As it has been stated in various writings: "Paradise is awarded to anyone who weeps for Husain or who laments in company with those who weep for Husain" . . .
>
> "Paradise is awarded": for the following reason, that every year, when the month of Muharram comes, a multitude of the lovers of the Family of the Prophet (*jam'i az muhibban-e Ahl-e Bayt*) renew and make fresh the tragedy of the Martyrs, and they bewail the offspring of the Lord of Prophecy. They enflame their hearts with the fire of sorrowful regret; their eyes stream with tears from the overwhelming extent of their loss.[5]

This passage reflects a recurrent motif in Shia devotional writings: the promise of the 'Gardens of Eternity' in exchange for the practice of communal lamentation in remembrance of the martyrs. Especially important to note from Kashifi's text are the words *muhibban-e Ahl-e Bayt*: "lovers

of the Family of the Prophet." Kashifi's sixteenth-century phrase, I would argue, is vital to an understanding of how Shiism has differentiated itself from other Islamic denominations. Shia populations have tended to understand themselves as a community that surpasses all others in its love for the Prophet's family and for the descendants of Fatima and Ali.[6] I would also argue that the practice of *matam* as the means par excellence of expressing this love is very relevant for understanding Shia self-definition in Ladakh today. I will return to this point below.

Sunni critics of *matam* have frequently derided this practice as *bid'ah*: an innovation for which no warrant exists in either the Qur'an or the *hadith* describing the actions and sayings of the Prophet. But Shia apologists defend the practice by citing precedents from antiquity. Contemporary Shia scholars such as Ghulam Husain Najafi quote *hadith* collections such as *Sahih Bukhari*, which are acceptable to Sunnis, in an attempt to demonstrate the orthodox quality of *matam*. Among the traditions cited by Najafi are the following. Adam and Eve lamented their murdered son Abel "until (as it is said) there flowed forth from their tears what amounted to a river." In fact, so great was Adam's grief that he shed his own blood and slapped his thigh repeatedly (*matam* practices performed today by South Asian Shias). The prophet Jacob displayed grief for Joseph; and Joseph, while imprisoned in Egypt, struck himself in anguish when he learned from the angel Gabriel of his father's sorrow. The Prophet Muhammad, gifted with foreknowledge, wept anticipatory tears when he heard of his grandson's forthcoming martyrdom; and the Prophet's wife Ayesha wailed extravagantly when her husband died.[7]

The point of such claims is to establish that there exists a *sunnah* (exemplary practice dating from antiquity) for *matam*. Prophets and other figures from sacred history who are venerated by Sunni and Shia alike, so the argument goes, practiced *matam* in the past upon learning of the death of those they loved. So it is only natural that those Muslims who love Husain should practice *matam* yearly on the anniversary of his death.

One final point is worth noting here with regard to the Karbala story and the practice of *matam*. This concerns Zuljenah, the horse ridden into battle by the Imam Husain. As will be recalled from the previous chapter, both Majlisi and Kashifi record traditions to the effect that Husain's mount served as a messenger announcing his death. When the Imam fell on the battlefield, Zuljenah, wounded and blood-stained with the blood of its master, galloped to the encampment of the Imam's family. And when the women saw the riderless horse approach, they knew at once that Husain had died, and they began to weep.

The horse, too, was grief-stricken at its master's death. "Zuljenah lowered its head," states Kashifi, "and teardrops fell from its eyes . . . Abu al-Mu'ayyad al-Khwarizmi has recorded a tradition to the effect that this horse beat its head against the earth [in grief] so many times that it died."[8] As will be seen in the following discussion, the figure of Zuljenah is of central importance in Leh township's annual Muharram procession.

HORSE OF KARBALA: A DESCRIPTION OF THE ZULJENAH PROCESSION IN LEH TOWNSHIP

The Shia Muslims of Leh township think of themselves as minorities both within their own Islamic community and within the larger population of the town. Overall, local Shias told me, the majority of Leh's population is Buddhist. Moreover, most of the town's Muslims are Sunnis, and the most conspicuous Muslim monument in Leh is the Sunni Jami Masjid that dominates the main bazaar. Local Shia informants I interviewed estimate there to be no more than 120 Shia households in Leh township, in comparison with a population of "over 300" Sunni and "over 1,000" Buddhist families.[9]

According to the oral histories I gathered from local Shia informants on visits to Leh in 1995, 1996, and 1997, in generations past the Shias of this town were generally politically powerless and impoverished, the objects of scant respect in the eyes of other faith communities. Consequently in the practice of their religious rituals they tried to draw as little attention as possible to themselves. In recent years, however, the situation has changed, and the best known Shia liturgical observances—the annual commemoration of the battle of Karbala, held during the Islamic month of Muharram—are now celebrated openly in the principal public areas of Leh Bazaar. In what follows I discuss the Zuljenah procession that comprises the focal point of Leh's Muharram observances, and I will use this procession as a way of analyzing communal relations among the Shia, Sunni, and Buddhist populations of the town. The discussion will illuminate aspects of the 1989-1992 "Social Boycott" that polarized Buddhist-Muslim interactions in Leh. Additionally, I intend to suggest how ritual can contribute to a community's self-definition.

Until 1989 outside observers characterized Buddhist-Muslim interactions in Ladakh as harmonious. Janet Rizvi, for example, in her 1983 study of Ladakhi society and culture, stated that "with a very few exceptions, communal feeling as experienced often so bitterly in other parts of India,

has so far been conspicuous by its absence."[10] But students of Ladakh are also aware of changes in Ladakhi society over the last twenty-five years and of the eruption of communal violence between Muslims and Buddhists in Leh in 1989, with continuing tension since then.

The origin of Leh's communal problems can be traced back as far as the 1830s, when the independent Buddhist kingdom of Ladakh was conquered by the Dogra forces of the Raja of Jammu. Subsequently, during the predominance of the British Raj, Ladakh was made part of the "native state" of Jammu and Kashmir. As Barbara Crossette has pointed out, this has meant that Ladakhi Buddhists have come to be a "minority within a minority," ruled from Muslim-majority Srinagar, which in turn is administered by Hindu-majority Delhi.[11]

Martijn van Beek and Kristoffer Bertelsen have described the process whereby Ladakhi aspirations for autonomy from Jammu and Kashmir came to be communalized, with the implicit equation: Ladakhi equals Buddhist, thereby leaving out of consideration long-term Muslim residents of Ladakh. Various developments since India's independence have contributed to Ladakhi Buddhists' perception of threats to their identity and cultural autonomy: the Chinese invasion of Tibet, a strong Islamic presence to the west in Pakistan, the establishment of a large Indian military base in Leh, and the subsequent use of Leh's military airstrip, since 1974, for tourism.[12]

Crossette points out that Ladakhi Buddhists in the town of Leh have tended to express more resentment against Kashmiri Muslim newcomers rather than long-term Muslim residents. Since 1974, local Buddhists say, Kashmiri entrepreneurs have come to dominate Leh's hotel business and other lucrative tourist-related trades. Additionally, some Buddhists have viewed Leh's Muslims as cat's-paws for Islamic fundamentalist groups operating out of Srinagar.[13]

Shridhar Kaul (an Indian author who is very partisan and pro-Buddhist in his writings on Ladakh) corroborates Crossette's observations about Buddhist suspicions of Muslims in Leh. According to Kaul, local Ladakhi Buddhists, at the time of the 1989 disturbances in Leh, claimed that Kashmiri Muslims based in Leh as merchants were responsible for inciting local Muslims against their Buddhist neighbors.[14] Worth emphasizing here is that Kaul is by no means free from bias. Rizvi describes him as having been "instrumental in setting up the Ladakh Buddhist Association," an organization that has been a key player in recent communal politics in the region, as will be described in more detail below.[15]

Another factor cited by Kaul in justifying Buddhist grievances was the Indian government's "neglect of the rich Bodhi language." Bodhi is the term

used by Kaul for Ladakhi, a designation intended to emphasize the Buddhist and Tibetan character of the language. Literally meaning "enlightenment" or "awakening," the word Bodhi carries immediate recognition value for its association with familiar terms from Buddhist vocabulary such as "Bodhisattva" and "Buddha." Kaul tries to make a case for the linguistic purity of Bodhi. "The language spoken in the region," he claims, "is Tibetan with local occasional variations of vocabulary from the standard language spoken in Lhasa." Kaul makes a distinction between the Bodhi dialect and Balti, which is the term used by some local inhabitants to designate the form of Ladakhi spoken by Muslims (especially those Shia Muslims who trace their origin to Baltistan). Bodhi is written in Tibetan script, Balti in Arabic. But Kaul's use of the term Balti tends to the uncomplimentary. In describing the Balti people as an ethnic group, he defines them as "the cross-breed between Dards of Chilas and Mongoloids inhabiting Baltistan."[16]

The bifurcation of the Ladakhi language into Balti and Bodhi seems to be recent. It is a function of Muslim-Buddhist communal politics and as such parallels the earlier fissuring of Hindustani into Urdu and Hindi as a function of Pakistani-Indian politics.

The importance of language politics is reflected in another assertion by Kaul, in which he refers to the "imposition of Urdu as medium of instruction" on Ladakhi schoolchildren as another source of Buddhist resentment.[17] The use of Urdu in Ladakhi schools continues to this day to be a high-profile issue for Buddhists in Leh. A popular-format magazine published in Leh, called *Ladags Melong*, featured an article in its May 1995 issue by Sonam Wangchuk, a member of the journal's editorial board, in which he complains about Ladakhi education and the primary-school curriculum imposed by the government. Wangchuk describes schoolchildren "reading, or in fact, chanting, in Urdu or Hindi about the world. They chant about the Taj Mahal and the Tower of Pisa but learn nothing about the Palace of Leh. They chant about elephants, coconuts and monsoon rains, but hear nothing about Yaks, apricots or glaciers."[18] Such statements reflect, I think, a desire to assert a distinction between Ladakhi identity and the symbols of Indian national identity.

The cover of this same issue of *Ladags Melong* featured a cartoon showing *gonda*-wearing schoolchildren (the *gonda*, a stovepipe hat with upturned brim, is a readily recognizable article of traditional Ladakhi headgear). In the cartoon the children are being crushed beneath a mountain of gargantuan textbooks. The books are labeled "Indian History," "English," "Hindi," and "Urdu."

Buddhist-Muslim tensions came to a head in July 1989, when communal riots erupted in Leh. A group of Muslim youths is said to have assaulted

Rigzin Jora, the man destined to become general secretary of the Ladakh Buddhist Association; a Buddhist mob is alleged to have set government buildings on fire. As an expression of their resentment against Kashmiri political domination, the Ladakh Buddhist Association declared a "Social Boycott" against local Muslim residents in Leh.[19]

Buddhists refused to shop in stores owned by Muslims; and, according to Muslim informants whom I interviewed in Leh, Buddhist and Muslim neighbors simply stopped talking to each other or having anything to do with each other socially. Nor did the boycott stop there. A Sunni Muslim from Srinagar, who was the owner of one of the hotels where I stayed in Leh, complained of how several of his windows had been smashed by stone-throwing Buddhists at the height of the Social Boycott in 1989.

The boycott lasted for three years. In November 1992, a compromise was reached whereby Muslims and Buddhists agreed to work together to seek the formation of a Leh Autonomous Hill District Council. Town residents I encountered in the period from 1995 through 1999 were unanimous in saying that communal relations were vastly improved in comparison with the tensions of the late 1980s. But they also expressed concern about the need to find ways to sustain these improved relations.

Given this background of lingering communal tension, I wasn't sure what I would encounter when I first went to Leh to study its Muharram observances. I visited Leh four times, during the Muharram season in 1995, 1996, and 1997, and then in the summer of 1999 to witness the "Day of the Lion" (to be described in a subsequent chapter). Once I had settled in, my initial impression of the town was very positive. Anticipating the worst, I was relieved to see positive interactions among the various communities. Shias and Sunnis each had roles to play in the public procession; and even Buddhists were invited (as will be described below) to take part in at least one aspect of the Ashura ritual. In the first interviews I conducted, both Buddhists and Muslims seemed careful to speak politely of each other. As I became closer to some informants, however, and made friends with them, they in turn became franker with me; and I was able to sense a disjunction between public discourse and private confession in the remarks directed to me. In what follows I will try to analyze this disjunction in terms of Leh's Zuljenah procession: for as I understand it, this ritual mediates tensions not only *between* Muslims and Buddhists but also *within* the town's Muslim population, between Shias and Sunnis. The ritual is performed in such a way that a certain degree of communal reconciliation can be displayed while distinctions among the communities (most notably between Shias and Sunnis) can be maintained and highlighted. In the following paragraphs I first describe

the order of events in Leh's Ashura procession (focusing on the 1997 celebration) and then analyze the significance of what I witnessed.

On the ninth of Muharram some half-dozen men drive from Leh to the nearby village of Chushot to bring a horse that has been designated as the *shabih* ("likeness" or "image") of Zuljenah.[20] The same horse is used every year in Leh's Ashura procession. Throughout the rest of the year this horse, a white Zanskari stallion, is free from work. No harness ever touches it, I was told: the stallion has been set aside to represent Zuljenah. The horse grazes where it likes and wanders unhindered from field to field. Its maintenance is provided by a *waqf* (charitable trust) established by the Anjuman-e Imamia, Leh's principal Shia organization. In 1997 the group that drove to Chushot included Fidai Husain (proprietor of the Yak Tail Hotel on Fort Road near the center of Leh), whose family has been involved for some years with the procession, Fidai's nephew Amjad Khan, who was to act as *mujavir* (the "attendant" who leads Zuljenah by its bridle in the procession), and Ghulam Abbas, an employee at the Government Animal Husbandry Project in Chamspa and incidentally a skilled polo player, who saw to the horse's well-being.

In Chushot the stallion was loaded onto a truck belonging to Fidai Husain and then driven to a site in Shey on the banks of the Indus. Here the horse was led into the river and subjected to a very thorough soap- and cold-water bath. As he washed the animal, Ghulam Abbas murmured a simple Arabic invocation, "In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful." The men described this bath as *ghusl*, the term used in Islam to describe ritual ablution. They explained to me that this *ghusl* was necessary because Zuljenah would be bearing the Word of God in the next day's procession.

From the river the truck was driven back to Leh, and the horse was stabled for the night in the courtyard of the Yak Tail Hotel. At nine o'clock on the morning of Ashura, the same group of men returned to the hotel. Amjad lit incense sticks and stuck them in the ground before the horse. Then he groomed the horse carefully, tied a votive cloth around its neck, and fitted a finely-stitched embroidered halter over its head. A mixed group of hotel employees—Muslims, Ladakhi Buddhists, and Nepali Hindus—stood about and watched with interest, commenting on the proceedings. Amjad gripped the halter, ready to lead the horse away. At that moment, Nargiss, the elderly mother of the hotel proprietor, pushed through the onlookers, cried out in an anguished wail, and buried her face against the horse's neck. She clung to the horse a moment, stepped back, sprayed it with perfume from a bottle, then wailed again. ("It's the tradition," Fidai Husain said to me later, "for the women of the house to cry when Zuljenah goes out.") A change had been

effected: until then bystanders had been patting the animal playfully, joking with each other, asking me to take photos of themselves with the horse. With the mother's cry, everyone grew quiet: a kind of consecration had occurred. The horse was now to serve as the likeness of Imam Husain's riderless mount.

From the Yak Tail, Amjad led Zuljenah along Old Fort Road and then through the back streets of the Zangsty quarter to the Balti Masjid or principal Shia mosque. Here, in a small walled yard beside the mosque, men of the Anjuman-e Imamia readied the horse for the procession. First they streaked its body and mane with red paint, to suggest the wounds inflicted on both Zuljenah and its rider. Then they caparisoned the stallion: a saddlecloth of Chinese silk; a saddle to which were attached the Imam's accoutrements: turban, shield, and sword; and a sandalwood *rihl* or Qur'an stand, atop which was carefully positioned a copy of the Qur'an, opened to the first page of *surat Ya-Sin* (chapter 36). The significance of this Qur'anic chapter is discussed below.

After this two live pigeons were tethered to the saddle and made to perch atop the stallion. Like the horse, the pigeons had been daubed with red paint. The story linked to these birds was mentioned in the previous chapter: they symbolize the two doves who passed over Karbala and alighted to dip their wings in Husain's blood. Thereafter they flew to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The blood dripping from their wings served the inhabitants as an announcement of the Imam's martyrdom. "So the pigeons and the horse are all messengers," I was told: messengers of Husain's death.

Once the pigeons had been securely tethered and the stallion fully adorned, the men began chanting a *nauha* (Muharram lamentation poem) to the accompaniment of *hath ka matam* (repetitive rhythmic striking of the chest with one's open hand). Then Zuljenah was led from the mosque to join the crowds awaiting it in the street. Now the Ashura procession could begin. The procession was organized by various *anjumans*, religious associations that were grouped according to place of origin. I describe these in some detail below.

The route followed by this procession is as follows: from the Balti Masjid to the Jami Masjid via the paved road that leads past the State Bank of India; then from the Jami Masjid down the main bazaar to the Shia *Matam-Serai*. Thus the route includes both Sunni and Shia religious sites.

I was particularly impressed to see the procession halt below the Jami Masjid's main staircase. Zuljenah waited at the foot of the stairs; atop the stairs stood Muhammad Umar, *maulvi* of this Sunni mosque, beside Shaikh

Mirza Husain, prayer leader of Leh's Shia community. With them stood officers of the Anjuman-e Imamia and the town's primary Sunni organization, the Anjuman-e Mu'in-e Islam (AMI). For nearly thirty minutes Shaikh Mirza addressed the crowd; then the procession headed down the main bazaar. At this point one additional group joined the procession: a gathering of young men, all of them Sunnis, I later learned, who had been waiting in front of the Jami Masjid. The order of the procession, then, as it left the Sunni mosque for the final stage of its route through the main bazaar, was as follows:

1. Some forty to fifty Sunnis, many of whom were AMI members, at the very head of the procession. They did not perform *matam* or sing *nauhas*. Instead, at irregular intervals they shouted religious slogans such as *Allahu akbar* (God is great) and *La ilah illa Allah* (There is no god save Allah).
2. Boys of the Imamia Mission School, Chushot. Like the other Shia groups, they carried a banner identifying them. Dressed in school uniforms and arranged in columns, they slapped themselves energetically and sang Muharram chants in an impressively tuneful manner. The oldest of them looked to be all of twelve years in age. Later I learned that the Imamia Mission School has on its faculty two Shia *maulvis* responsible for *islamiyyat*, religious instruction that includes the teaching of *nauhas* in two languages, Urdu and Balti.
3. The Imamia Youth Federation Leh. This subdivision of the Anjuman-e Imamia comprises men ranging in age from their late teens to their early forties. The Youth Federation includes many of the most active organizers of the procession.
4. Zuljenah, led by its *mujavirs* and preceded by a dozen or so teenaged boys and young men. Virtually all the Shias in the procession performed *matam*; but while most participants limited themselves to bare-handed *hath ka matam*, the young men clustered immediately before the horse frantically scourged themselves in the action of *zanjir-zani*: striking the back or the forehead with blades attached to a long chain. It was clear that Zuljenah constituted the focal point of sacredness for the entire procession; and these chain-wielding boys had claimed for themselves the area immediately in front of the stallion, facing the horse as they struck themselves, leaving a trail of blood along the bazaar as they marched. Confronted with this tumult, the horse snorted and bucked at times; the attendants kept a firm grip on its halter.

5. Another group from Chushot, the Chushot Goma Association. Chushot, I was told, is one of the oldest and most established Shia localities in Leh district. There are two *matam-serais* in Chushot, including a handsomely decorated shrine built in 1994.
6. Javanan-e Phyang (Youths of Phyang Village). As I watched, participants engaged in the kind of *hath ka matam* called *Baltistani uslub* (Balti style): both hands strike the heart simultaneously, one hand atop the other in a forceful blow. Phyang has two active *matam-serais*, the older of which is decorated with appliqué cloth wall-hangings sewn in the Middle East and brought back from Iraq and Iran by Ladakhi Shia pilgrims who donate the hangings to Phyang's shrine.
7. The Dasteh-ye Ansar-e Husaini (Group of Husaini Friends), from the village of Thikse, which also has its own *matam-serai*.
8. A third Shia association from Chushot, the so-called "Khomeini Dasteh."
9. The Ittihad al-Muslimin-e Kargil (The Union of Muslims of Kargil). This group is composed of Kargili Shias resident in Leh. Most of them are seasonal workers who come to Leh during the warmest months of the year in search of work. The group's president is Akhund Mahdi, who told me that some three thousand Kargilis live in Leh, all of whom, he claimed, are members of the Ittihad. According to him, ninety percent of these migrant workers are illiterate; they do manual labor, as road workers, masons, and the like. The president is a business contractor who specializes in finding construction work for Kargilis. As head of the Ittihad, Akhund Mahdi arranges three religious celebrations a year: commemoration of the birth of the Imam Ali; Eed al-Ghadir (remembrance of the occasion when the Prophet announced Ali as his successor); and Muharram. He keeps order among the Kargilis during the Ashura march and in general coordinates the Ittihad's activities with those of Leh's Anjuman-e Imamia. He also mediates any problems that arise throughout the year between Kargilis and the townspeople of Leh. Thus as president of the Ittihad, Akhund Mahdi combines social, business, and spiritual functions.

In surveying Leh's Ashura procession as a whole, it should be noted that all the marchers are male. Women watch at some distance, whether from streetside or from rooftops lining the route. Women do have an active role, however, in at least one aspect of the Ashura procession, involving Zuljenah. During the march, mothers bring their children (usually infants or toddlers) up to the stallion, to press the child against its flank or else pass

the child under the horse's belly. The women will at the same time offer money to Zuljenah's attendants. *Maulvis* whom I asked used the term *mannat manna* (making a vow/promise) to explain the practice: these women offer money and pray to the horse for their children's health. The practice has generated criticism from non-Shia observers, a point to which I return later.

I was very impressed by the active cooperative presence of a group of Sunni Muslims in the procession, a practice very different from Muharram observances in localities such as Lucknow or Hyderabad. Sunni participation extends to other areas as well. AMI officers whom I interviewed in 1996 claimed that they help with arrangements to spray rosewater over processionists and to provide first aid for wounded flagellants. Furthermore, on Ashura the Kashmiri Art Dealers Association—all of whose members are said to be Sunni—sets up a *sabil* or refreshment stand of fruit juice and tea in the main bazaar for those in the procession. (The tradition of the *sabil* is linked to the thirst of the Karbala martyrs. By providing drinks to participants on Ashura, donors show that if they had been present at Karbala, they would have tried to ease the suffering of Husain and his followers.)

Sunni AMI members told me that they have cooperated with the Shia Anjuman-e Imamia in participating in the Muharram procession "fully, ever since the beginning, for the last thirty-five or forty years," that is, ever since Leh's Shia community first began staging the procession in public. This assertion touches on a point of controversy to be discussed more fully below.

Buddhist participation in Leh's Muharram activities also impressed me. When I first visited Ladakh in 1995 I was invited to a *chhauta din ka majlis* (a gathering held four nights after Ashura) in Leh's *matam-serai*. The evening began with a "funeral feast" in honor of the Karbala martyrs; among the guests were a half-dozen members of the Ladakh Buddhist Association. On Ashura many Buddhists—including a number of monks—line the street to observe the Zuljenah procession. If they do not participate actively, at least they watch with a quiet solemnity appropriate to the occasion. And Anjuman-e Imamia members noted with approval that in the village of Chushot, Buddhist families allow Zuljenah to graze unhindered in their fields throughout the year.

COMMUNAL HARMONY AND COMMUNAL TENSIONS IN THE ZULJENAH PROCESSION

This impression of Leh's Muharram rituals as the locus of communal harmony is accurate only up to a certain point. Over time I also learned of tensions that surface during this period.

Within the Shia community this tension becomes focused on the issue of *zanjiri-matam*, the shedding of one's own blood through the use of knives or chains. Even the most casual observer of the Ashura procession will note this aspect of the ritual: for the teenagers and young men who perform *zanjiri-matam* are very conspicuous. They take up a great deal of space immediately in front of Husain's horse, which is the focal point of attention for the crowds on Ashura; they leave a trail of blood and dripping bandages along the street; and they follow the horse into the *matam-serai* at the end of the procession.

In 1996, the first time I witnessed Leh's Zuljenah ritual, I followed the procession the whole length of the bazaar and then found it impossible to get inside the shrine for the climaxing liturgy that closes the day. The *matam-serai*, it should be noted, is really not all that big. And yet as soon as Zuljenah began to be coaxed down the staircase leading to the shrine's arched entranceway, it seemed as if all the hundreds of people on the street wanted to crowd indoors at once. Horse, attendants, onlookers, flagellants: all had to squeeze and bottleneck themselves through the narrow archway.

"It will be like the tumult of Judgment Day," a Muslim friend had warned me. And he was right. My claustrophobic reaction: I stayed out on the street and waited for Zuljenah to reemerge.

But I was back the next year and this time did things differently. A half-hour before the procession reached its end, I broke free from the crowds and rushed ahead to the *matam-serai*.

Inside it was quiet and dark. A reciter chanted dirges in honor of the martyrs; knots of people sat on the floor and chatted; two turbaned mullahs awaited the horse's arrival beside a pulpit at the far end of the hall. Knowing Zuljenah would be brought right up to the pulpit, I chose a nearby bit of carpet as my station.

I was not alone in wanting to get a good seat early. More and more people entered; all available floor space was taken; I was nudged by the press of visitors to the very back of the shrine. Out on the street the sound of the procession came near. Still more people pressed in. Room somehow was found for them all.

Then uproar at the top of the entrance stairway. Beside me one of the mullahs stood and climbed stiffly to the highest step of the pulpit. He lifted a robed arm, pointed dramatically to the entrance. "*Zuljenah a reha hay.*" He delivered the announcement with a bellow: "Zuljenah is coming!"

I had to take his word for it. There were too many devotees in the way for me to see the horse yet. But its presence made itself felt. A fresh rush of participants forced their way down the entrance stairs and into the shrine. Flagellants appeared by the far doorway at the foot of the stairs and cut

themselves with flails. A glimpse of the stallion: it lifted its head as if in protest but was dragged inside by its halter.

Again from the pulpit: "Zuljenah is coming!" Recalcitrant, the horse was urged forward. The crowd inside the shrine pressed forward to touch the horse. Chanters sang a *nauha* into microphones. Static squealed from loudspeakers.

As the horse neared the pulpit, the mullah addressed it with a shout. "Where is Husain? Husain, we are waiting for you!" His words led the congregation from the present to the past: the drama of the riderless horse.

To the foot of the pulpit Zuljenah was led. Once more the preacher bellowed: "Husain, we are waiting for you!" From the second-floor women's gallery came a wail in response. The tumult of Judgment Day.

Around the inside of the *matam-serai* the horse was then led in a circuit, until finally it was guided back up the stairs and out into the sunlight. And all this while the flagellants had stood inside the entranceway, cutting themselves with their blade-and-chain flails, spilling blood onto the floor of the shrine.

Every year, I was told, some of these flagellants injure themselves so badly as to require hospitalization or other medical treatment. In 1996 and again in 1997 I frequently saw older men try—at the risk of harm to themselves—to restrain flail-swinging teenagers who had gotten carried away by religious enthusiasm. In the next chapter I tell the story of a Shia friend in Leh and what happened to him when he tried to curb the self-scourging excesses of boys on the street.

A number of the Shias I interviewed in Leh district, including *maulvis*, educated laypeople, and older persons in their fifties and sixties, showed some embarrassment when I questioned them on the topic of *zanjiri-matam*. Their objections to the practice can be summarized as follows:

1. The practice involves both immodesty and loss of self-control, which violate the canon of deportment and public behavior so important in Islam.
2. Self-flagellation, with its attendant risk of serious injury, shows a lack of proper respect for the body.
3. The practice is irrational, illogical: "If someone is so eager to shed his blood," as one Shia critic told me, "he should do something useful with it, donate a transfusion to a blood bank."[21]
4. *Zanjir-zani* involves a misplaced use of one's energy. Instead of devoting themselves to self-scourging, flagellants should emphasize the "Five Pillars" (the testimony of faith, fasting, almsgiving, ritual prayer,

and pilgrimage to Mecca), respectable behavior approved of by all Muslims.

5. Flowing blood is normally *najis* (ritually polluting); many flagellants are said to be careless about performing prayer and entering shrines while blood-stained.[22]
6. Spilling one's blood in public gives onlookers a bad impression of Islam in general and Shiism in particular.

In support of this last argument, *maulvis* I interviewed in Leh, Thikse, and Kargil alike all made reference, either directly or indirectly, to a fatwa issued by Sayyid Ali Khamenei, spiritual leader of the Iranian Islamic Republic. In a pronouncement dated 7 Muharram 1415 (A.D. 1994), he declared "unlawful and forbidden" acts of *matam* performed in public involving the use of weapons to shed one's blood. Ayatollah Khamenei's primary concern was the harm that might befall the image of Shia Islam if outsiders saw Muharram mourners scourging themselves:

> If the action of striking oneself with a weapon were actually carried out in private homes behind closed doors, then the harm coming from support for this practice would be solely a question of bodily injury. But when this action takes place before witnesses and in front of television cameras and the eyes of enemies and foreigners, and even before the eyes of our own young, at this point there is an additional harm that must be measured. It is not a question of individual or physical harm, but of great injuries linked to the reputation of Islam.[23]

In forbidding the public performance of bloody matam, Khamenei warned that "propagandists of the Satan of Imperialism" might point to this practice in order to "present both Islam and Shiism as an institution of superstition."[24]

Such criticisms have made little headway to date in stemming the practice of flagellation-*matam* in Ladakh. This controversy can be compared with a somewhat analogous situation in contemporary Taiwan, where young men known as *pa-chia chiang* (spirit guardians) perform a religious discipline in which they strip to the waist and wound themselves with spikes and metal skewers. Then, blood dripping from face and chest, they march in public procession before their neighborhood temple. Some of the *pa-chia chiang* go on to become *dangki* (divining youths), spirit-mediums who convey to troubled temple visitors insights and healing from various deities. In his study of popular Taiwanese religion John A. Grim points out that the *pa-chia*

chiang's ascetic practices violate Confucian canons and Chinese cultural strictures against self-mutilation. Nevertheless, Grim asserts, "the ascetic rites of the *pa-chia chiang* and the *dangki* are examples of behavior that is antisocial but evocative, ultimately, of spiritual power that transforms and orders what is ill and disordered . . . [T]he power generated by such ascetic practices also generates tolerance in the viewing audience, which holds a normative ethics prohibiting mutilation of one's body."[25]

By extension one might argue with regard to Ladakh that it is precisely the abnormal and disturbing quality of *zanjiri-matam* that constitutes one source of its power. The apparent loss of self-control, the "illogical" shedding of blood, the lack of normal respect for one's body: the very things about which the *maulvis* complain serve in fact to announce to onlookers that Ashura is a special day, the high point of a holy season.[26] Bloody *matam* helps one cross the threshold to the realm of the sacred. Very appropriate it is, then, that the flagellants perform immediately in front of Zuljenah, the horse whose presence announces the violent death of Husain, the most solemn and tragic of all the events of Karbala. Bloody *matam* helps identify Zuljenah as the focus of the procession, the horse that attracts vows and donations from women on behalf of their children, the horse that triggers outbursts of grief at its appearance.

Critics of *zanjiri-matam* seem to be attempting to reduce Shiism to a set of antiseptically logical propositions acceptable to all Muslims. I would speculate that such critics have been influenced by political strategies fostered by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini since the founding of the Islamic Republic, strategies oriented to the furthering of Sunni-Shia ideological rapprochement and tactical cooperation in the realm of international affairs.[27]

But reductionist criticism of *matam* fails to take into account the fact that ritual is not reducible to purely rational propositions. As Catherine Bell states in her work *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, "[W]e can speak of the natural logic of ritual, a logic embodied in the physical movements of the body and thereby lodged beyond the grasp of consciousness and articulation. The principles underlying this logic can be made explicit only with great difficulty; they are rarely in themselves the objects of scrutiny or contention."[28]

Bell goes on to describe how ritual contributes to the formation of a comprehensive all-embracing socio-religious environment and to the "generation of a loosely integrated whole in which each element 'defers' to another in an endlessly circular chain of reference." The result, she says, is "the sense of a universal totality, a unified and authoritative coherence informing the whole scheme of things."[29]

Bell's model of the "logic embodied in the physical movements of the body" can be applied to help explain the enduring popularity of *matam* in general and bloody *matam* in particular. As flagellants strike themselves repeatedly to the accompaniment of rhythmic dirges, the body becomes a percussive instrument that internalizes both spiritual experience and cultural values. A "chain of reference" is established and evoked, even if the references are not consciously articulated at every point in the ritual:

1. The Shias' historical experience of suffering, persecution, and exclusion (evoked by the Muharram commemoration of Husain's death, a death that barred Shias from political dominance), resulting in myths linked to occultation, hiding, and the need for secrecy[30] (the motif of secrecy and hiding is particularly relevant to the experience of Leh's Shias, as will be seen below).
2. The Shias' self-definition as *muhibban-e Ahl-e Bayt*, "lovers of the family of the Prophet"; precisely because of this love, in the Shias' view, they have been subjected to persecution.
3. The Shias' borrowing of motifs from Sufi love poetry: ecstasy in the presence of the Beloved, behavior that earns the condemnation of outside observers, defiant disregard for worldly opinion.[31]
4. Love for *Ahl-e Bayt*, expressed in terms of voluntary self-sacrifice and ritual slaughter, linked to the Shia esotericist equation of Husain with the *dhibh 'azim* (great sacrifice)[32] of Qur'an 37.107, the ram whose blood was shed to save Abraham's son from sacrificial death.
5. The prophet Abraham, who is described in the Qur'an (chapter 21.51-71) as having been rejected and persecuted by his own people for his steadfast love of God and his refusal to conform to their norms of worship. Abraham's suffering evokes the first point in this "chain of reference," the Shias' own historical experience of persecution.

The above points are by no means exhaustive. They are meant simply to suggest the rich set of associations linked to *matam* for participants in Ashura. *Matam* functions in a somewhat different way, however, with regard to Shia-Sunni relations in Leh township, insofar as it serves to demarcate communal boundaries. As noted above, Sunnis march in the annual Ashura procession. Moreover, Sunni AMI officers assured me that they have been active in supporting the procession ever since Leh's Shias began holding Muharram processions in public. Sunni participation in Leh's Muharram activities, they insisted, dates back many years.

But Shias of the Anjuman-e Imamia flatly denied Sunni assertions that the AMI and the Sunni community have been supportive and active participants in Ashura ever since the Shias first began holding a public procession some thirty-five to forty years ago. On the contrary, the Shia caretaker of Leh's *matam-serai* told me: "The Sunnis used to treat us badly, as if they were the emperor Aurangzeb." In the old days, I was told by officers of the Anjuman-e Imamia, Muharram in Leh township had not always been well-attended nor even celebrated in public. According to the oral histories I gathered from members of the Anjuman-e Imamia, a hundred years ago the Shias in Leh had been few in number and poverty-stricken. "In those days," the president of the Anjuman told me, "the Sunnis would throw stones at us." So the Shias always held their *majalis* (Muharram lamentation gatherings) in secret, "in a secret *matam-serai*, in a dark place," as one officer told me, "very quiet, no lights, so no one else would know." This "dark place" was called the Zangsty Matam-Serai.[33]

During the 1997 season some of my Shia informants took me to visit the Zangsty Matam- Serai. It is located behind an unmarked door in two small rooms on the upper floor of an old building behind the Balti Masjid. The rooms could never have held more than a total of some forty congregants. From the street, my guides told me, outsiders would never have been able to tell that within was a Shia place of worship. It is abandoned now and in ruins, but the Zangsty Matam-Serai's cramped quarters and inconspicuous location say much about the marginal position of Leh's Shias until very recent times.

Gradually, however, the Shia population of Leh township grew in the wake of partition and independence, with Shias emigrating especially from Kargil and Baltistan (Pakistan's "Northern Areas"). As their numbers increased, the confidence of Leh's Shias grew; and so, some forty years ago (my informants were not in agreement on the exact date, although several offered the date 1951), they began holding a public Muharram procession on Ashura. It was also at that time, in the 1950s, that the new *matam-serai* was built in Leh's main bazaar. This new shrine, a proud two stories high, was much larger and much more conspicuous than its predecessor. I estimated there to be some six hundred participants present on the ground floor alone on Ashura eve during the 1996 and 1997 Muharram seasons.[34]

My Shia informants insisted that very few Sunnis participated in the Shias' Ashura procession before 1989 and the communal disorders that started that year. According to both Shias of the Anjuman-e Imamia and Thupstan Chhewang, former president of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) and now head of the new Autonomous Hill Council, when the LBA

initiated the Social Boycott, they directed it primarily at Leh's resident Sunnis, whom the Buddhists described as agents of Kashmiri fundamentalists in Srinagar. At the beginning of the boycott, the Sunnis appealed for help to the Shias. The result was the formation of the Ladakh Muslim Association. This organization has been described by John Crook, in his study of contemporary Ladakhi politics, as "an ad hoc body called upon whenever a united Muslim front required representation."[35] The Buddhist response was negative. "When the Shias joined hands with the Sunnis," Thupstan Chhewang told me, "we turned against them both."

The *liturgical* reflection of this Muslim alliance, according to my Shia informants, was the fact that Sunnis began participating in Ashura in large numbers and in a conspicuous fashion. "They wanted to send the message to other communities," as one Shia told me, "*ham Musulman log sab eik hein*: we Muslim folks are all one." Nevertheless, even at the height of the boycott, the liturgically discerning could distinguish one group from another. Sunnis marched at the front, instead of clustering before Zul Jenah; and although they would cry out *Allahu akbar* in unison, Sunnis refrained from chanting *nauhas* or performing *matam*. This is because *matam*, as both Sunni and Shia informants agreed, "is something only Shias do."

As of 1997, Sunnis continued to participate in Leh's Ashura procession (although their numbers have diminished somewhat since the end of the Social Boycott). But some of them at least have been willing to voice private misgivings about Shia practices associated with the march. In 1996 Maulvi Muhammad Umar, the Sunni imam of Leh's Jami Masjid, was present outside the mosque to greet the crowds surrounding Zuljenah. He welcomed participants and spoke briefly but eloquently about *qurban-e Hazrat Husain*, the sacrifice of Lord Husain, as a prelude to the chief sermon delivered by Shaikh Mirza of the Shia Matam-Serai. The assembled presence on the mosque steps of Sunni prayer leader and Shia mullah, of AMI officers and Anjuman-e Imamia members, certainly presented a convincing picture of interdenominational harmony for any non-Muslims who might be watching.

But one morning I interviewed the Sunni *maulvi* in his home. During the course of a long conversation he commented on the various aspects of *bid'ah* (heretical innovation) that have crept into Shia observances over the years. "Did you see the men come up to bow before Zuljenah and touch its saddle-cloth? Did you see the women press their babies against the horse and offer money? They're praying to the horse. They're asking the horse to guard their children's health. This is the kind of thing," he said forcefully, "that Hindus or Buddhists might be expected to do, but not good Muslims."

Or take the excessive weeping, I was told, that the Shias engage in during their *majalis*: there's no passage in the Qur'an, the *maulvi* said, justifying such extreme displays of emotion. *Bid'ah*. Likewise *matam*: no scriptural warrant for this. *Bid'ah*. Nevertheless, the Sunni maulvi told me, when he addresses the mixed crowd on Ashura he avoids mentioning anything controversial, *matam, zanjir-zani*, veneration of Zuljenah, anything that might be considered *bid'ah*. He sticks to *qurban-e Hazrat Husain*, a topic that meets with a more nearly universal positive response. The *maulvi*'s comments seemed to me one instance among many of a tendency I noticed again and again in my time in Ladakh: the disjunction between public and private discourse in talk about Muharram.

In a conversation with Nisar Husain, one of Zuljenah's custodians, I made a discreet reference to the Sunni shaikh's critique. His reply was spirited. Nisar reminded me first of all that a copy of the Qur'an is mounted atop the stallion. "So when people bow, they're really bowing to the word of God, not just to some horse." He added that during the procession the Qur'an is opened to the first page of *surat Ya-Sin* (chapter 36), which according to Islamic tradition is "the heart of the Qur'an," a summary of all the essential teachings contained in Muslim scripture.[36] This demonstrates, he said, that Leh's Shias have a deep respect for the basics of their faith. Such an argument constitutes a carefully thought-out apologetics against any charge of *bid'ah*.

The disparity between private opinion and public response can also be noted with regard to Buddhist perceptions of Muharram. Buddhists whom I saw on the street watching the Ashura procession seemed appropriately solemn, wearing expressions that bespoke respect if not reverence. Buddhists with whom I spoke in private, however, showed little understanding of the history or religious worldview underlying Muharram. "They do it to honor their god, I guess," said a hotel clerk whom I interviewed. "But why do they have to spill blood all over the street?" Another Ladakhi Buddhist, a cook and trekking guide whom I met in Chamspa village (adjacent to Leh), did a very skillful mimicry of Shia processionists performing *matam*, triggering loud laughter among the other Buddhist porters. He turned and said to me, "Why do these Muslims do this to themselves? There's no reason to beat yourself." A German student volunteer living with a Ladakhi Buddhist family for a homestay met me on the morning of Ashura and told me that her hosts had tried to discourage her from coming out to see the procession. "They think it's bad, it's disgusting, that there's no sense to it," she reported.

The Shias I interviewed in Leh seemed very aware of the mental reservations concerning Muharram held by both Buddhists and Sunni Mus-

lims. I spoke with officers and members of the Shia Anjuman-e Imamia on numerous occasions during my time in Leh; and gradually the tone they took with me changed. In our initial conversations they insisted that the wounds caused by the Social Boycott had healed completely, and that communal relations were now as positive as they had been in the old days. In subsequent conversations, however, they told me tales of what happened to people who showed disrespect to Zuljenah during the procession. A Punjabi Hindu came to Leh and burst out into laughter when he saw Shias venerate the horse. At once divine punishment paralyzed the man's face, and his face remained frozen in a mask of irreverent laughter for the rest of his life. Only recently had this happened, I was told, a few years ago. A true story, they insisted. Another story: a local Buddhist smirked openly while watching the procession go by. Moments later he dropped dead. Again, I was told, a true story. Stories like this suggest that Leh's Shias are well aware of the attitude of other faith communities. Such tales comprise a kind of defensive shield, a storyteller's way of fighting back.

What is the situation today? The Muslim Association disintegrated in 1994. Once the Social Boycott ended, the most compelling reason for inter-Muslim cooperation had vanished (although it should be noted that in 1999 the association resurfaced, a circumstance that is described in a later chapter). Sunnis still participate in Ashura, though in diminished numbers when compared with the crisis days of the boycott. The Sunni AMI prides itself on undertaking preparations to help with the procession, but it does so without coordinating efforts with the Shia *anjuman*. The result, I noticed, was a certain duplication of effort.

Buddhists are invited to the *chhauta din ka majlis* funeral feast on the fourteenth of Muharram, and this is certainly a good gesture in the name of communal harmony. On the other hand, during my visits from 1995 through 1997 I noticed that calls to prayer from the town's minarets very frequently coincided with Buddhist chanting being broadcast from the Shanti Stupa and other *gompas*: a displeasing cacophony of *adhan* and droning *om*, "a kind of communal competition by loudspeaker," as V. K. Singh (my Hindu-secularist police colleague) observed with considerable wryness.

But if marks of competition are there, one can also pick out signs of cooperation. While I was in Leh in May of 1996, Shaikh Mirza Husain, mullah of the local *matam-serai*, attended a rally sponsored by the town's Buddhists to protest Chinese repression of Tibetans in connection with the recent Panchen Lama controversy.[37] Shaikh Mirza addressed the rally, saying, "The Chinese are atheists. But Buddhists, like Muslims, are religious people and believe in a god; therefore, we are with you. We are on your side."

Or take the case of a Shia informant I'll call Reza. Reza and I became—I think I can use the word—friends during my visits to Ladakh. He helped arrange interviews, took me to shrines in the hills near Leh, invited me to his home for dinner, and sat with me and laughed as I took turns with his children in singing old hymns and school songs. Throughout our many talks he insisted on the good quality of Muslim-Buddhist relations today, stating that things were now back to the status quo ante, that communal divisions had been healed.

Then, on the morning of my departure at the end of the 1997 season, he insisted on going with me to the airport and talked his way past the security guards so he could keep me company for two and a half hours in the waiting lounge. And it was only then, in our final chat together, in the noise and anonymity of an airport departure hall, that he told me of the anger he had felt back in 1989 when he saw childhood Buddhist friends throwing rocks at Muslim mosques, of the events that led to his personal role in the street-fighting of July and August 1989 in the main bazaar, and of how he's glad nowadays to see Buddhists being invited once more to Shia shrines during Muharram, but that he feels so bitter that it's impossible for him to call any of them friends any more.

This, to borrow a phrase from Michael Peletz in his recent study of Muslim Malay society, is an example of "confessional venting." The departing field-worker, essentially a stranger, has lost his temporary status of family member in the life of the village. The host can now feel free to vent all the ambivalence he must otherwise restrain concerning other members of the family.[38]

Does Reza's bitterness mean that the positive communal relations advertised on Ashura are purely fictional? I would say no. As in any family—to continue the metaphor—memories are long, few ruptures are final, few reconciliations definitive. Nevertheless, Leh's Muharram liturgies are important to the community because they allow roles for a number of key players, Shia, Sunni, and Buddhist alike, and because they help keep communal relations going, despite underlying ambivalence, imperfections and all.

EIGHT

Shia Lamentation Rituals and Reinterpretations of the Doctrine of Intercession: Two Cases from Modern India

SHAFA'AH (INTERCESSION) AND THE QUR'ANIC DOCTRINE OF TAWHID (DIVINE UNITY): A STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Knowing my interest in forms of Shia popular piety, colleagues occasionally send me copies of polemical writings criticizing the more controversial manifestations of Shia devotionalism. One such text sent to me recently was a translation of Muhibbudeen al-Khateeb's *al-Khutut al-'aridah* (originally published in the 1950s), entitled *Broad Aspects of Shi'ite Religion (Exposition and Refutation)*. One of the author's harshest comments occurs in his discussion of *tawhid* (the monotheistic assertion of God's oneness), belief in which is required of all Muslims: "Sunnis believe that Allah is the One, the Only, God, the Almighty Subduer. He has no partners or rivals . . . The Shi'ites also believe in Allah the Exalted and His Oneness, except that they adulterate this belief with polytheistic rituals and observances. They implore and make supplication to Allah's slaves and worshippers rather than to Him alone, saying, 'O 'Ali!' and 'O Husain!' and 'O Zainab!' . . . They consider their Imams to be infallible, to have knowledge of the unseen, and to partake in the administration of the universe."[1]

The author's unsympathetic harshness notwithstanding, he does identify a distinctive aspect of Shia piety: belief in the intercessory power of the Imams and the Karbala martyrs, despite the apparent infringement of the doctrine of *tawhid*. This question of *shafa'ah* (intercession) interests me because of its link with the popular Shia practice of *matam*, which I have discussed in previous chapters: gestures of mourning in honor of Husain and the other martyrs.

In this chapter I bring together data from my fieldwork in Hyderabad and Ladakh in order to discuss the doctrine of intercession and liturgical actions linked therewith, focusing on reassessments of intercession and critiques of *matam* in the twentieth century. To provide a context for my field observations I begin with a review of devotional and doctrinal literature from the premodern era concerning intercession.

It seems to me that in recent years attempts by Shia scholars and religious leaders to curb the more spectacular and bloody forms of *matam* have met with relatively little response to date among popular audiences. I will argue that this lack of success is due to a failure to appreciate fully the nature of *matam*'s appeal to its practitioners.

PENITENCE AND INTERCESSION IN THE SHIA TRADITION: THE PREDESTINARIAN QUALITY OF THE BATTLE OF KARBALA

Within the Shia Muslim tradition, the *ulama* (authoritative religious scholars), like their counterparts in the Sunni form of Islam, acknowledge the importance of contrition and the individual's personal spiritual state in discussions of penitence and the forgiveness of sins. An example can be found in a recent popular-format work entitled *Namaz-e shi'a-ye ithna 'ashari* ("Forms of Prayer in Twelver Shia Islam"), an Urdu-language text published in Lahore. The book's compilers state that they base their presentation on the fatwas or religious rulings of eminent Shia authorities such as the Ayatollahs Abu'l Qasim al-Khu'i, Ruhollah Khomeini, and Muhammad Kazim Shari'atmadari. Included is a section entitled *Namaz-e tawbeh* ("Prayers of Repentance"), prescribing the prayers to be recited by the individual penitent who wishes to beseech God directly for the forgiveness of specific sins. Together with the stipulation that the penitent is to recite *surat al-ikhlas* (chapter 112 of the Qur'an) sixty times while performing the *rak'a* of ritual bows and prostration, the text indicates that "this method of doing penance is to be performed with sincerity and purity of heart." Following this

preparation the individual is to recite an Arabic penitential prayer, the text of which emphasizes the believer's remorse and resolve to reform his or her behavior in all future actions.[2]

Aside from its citation of Ja'far al-Sadiq (the sixth Imam) and other Shia figures as authoritative sources, this portion of the *Namaz-e shi'a* is entirely in conformity with the Sunni universalist emphasis on the individual sinner's responsibility to face God directly without benefit of intercessor. Much more characteristic of Shia popular piety, however, is a devotional *hadith* known as *Du'a' al-mashlul* ("The Paralytic's Prayer"). This text is found in 'Abbas Qummi's anthology of Shia religious invocations, the *Mafatih al-jinan* ("Keys of the Gardens of Paradise"); but I first learned of it from Mohammad Amir Haider Khan, the late Maharajkumar of Mahmudabad, who in 1989 presented me with his own translation of the *Du'a' al-mashlul* (which he had had printed in pamphlet form in Lucknow). The Maharaja prefaces his translation of the *Du'a'* with a synopsis of the legend surrounding it.

One evening, so the story goes, the Imam Husain, in company with his father Ali ibn Abi Talib, was performing the *tawaf* (ritual circumambulation) around the shrine of the Kaaba. There they came upon a young man named Manazil ibn Lahiq, who had once stolen money from his own family and raised his hand against his father when the latter remonstrated with him. Manazil's father cursed him and died shortly thereafter. As a result God afflicted the youth with paralysis.

Remorseful and ashamed, Manazil then made his way to the Kaaba, where he repeatedly cried out to God, "Forgive me by the grace of Thy bounty and Thy mercy!" In his distress Manazil recited to Husain and Ali the entire story of his sinfulness, affliction, and repentance. Thereupon, so the Maharaja's synopsis of the legend tells us, "On hearing this sad tale, Hazrat Ali was moved by pity and compassion." The Imam thereupon taught Manazil the words of a prayer that led to the young man's miraculous cure overnight.[3]

This legend of the paralytic demonstrates the intercessory power of the Shia Imams: God permits them to act as the means whereby He responds to the prayers of penitent sinners. Yet a problem arises. How can the Imams' salvific role as intercessors be reconciled with the Qur'an's assertion (in Chapter 35.18) that "no soul may bear the burden of sins for another soul," that we as sinners must face God alone without resorting to evasion or intermediaries in accounting for our actions on earth?

In Shia theology the Qur'anic concept of individual moral responsibility is reconciled with the Imams' power of intercession through an esoteric interpretation of the events surrounding the battle of Karbala and the death

of the Imam Husain. In the exegesis offered in the *Ithna 'Ashari* or Twelver Shia tradition, the Imams earned their intercessory abilities through Husain's martyrdom at Karbala, and believers in every age may gain access to the Imams' intercession by vicarious participation in the tragedy of Karbala.

The choice to participate is the responsibility of each believing individual. It entails three levels of commitment: engaging in ritual to commemorate the martyrs and taste their sufferings; identifying oneself as a Shia, with the possibility of making one's identity public as a gesture of defiance against the unjust powers of the world; and taking upon oneself the risk of enduring persecution and violence, just as the Alid partisans who stood with Husain at Karbala did.[4]

Such a commitment is a way of acknowledging the divine attributes of mercy and justice described in the Qur'an. The intercession made available to us through Husain's sacrifice reflects God's quality of mercy; but His quality of justice is retained insofar as we must each individually choose to gain access to Husain's intercession through the actions we freely initiate. Those who fail to honor Husain will be held responsible for their actions and will answer to divine justice on the Day of Judgment.

Shia Islam, I would argue, shares with Christianity an origin rooted in a meditation on the violent death of a charismatic leader. Crucifixion at Golgotha and slaughter at Karbala posed an anguishing challenge for the early followers of Jesus and Husain. How was one to account for what to the rest of the world appeared to be simply a political protest movement that had ended in failure?

Just as the Gospel of Luke in the "Road to Emmaus" story (24.13-32) made clear the necessity for Christ's death ("Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"), so, too, did Shia exegesis regard Husain's martyrdom as both necessary and life-giving.

Shia theological meditations on Karbala have repeatedly emphasized that the Imam's death was not the result of quixotic misjudgment or poor battle tactics on the part of Husain. The celebrated seventeenth-century jurisconsult Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi in his *Bihar al-anwar* ("The Oceans of Lights") emphasized the predestinarian quality of the events at Karbala. In a chapter entitled "The Ways in Which God Informed His Prophets of the Forthcoming Martyrdom of Husain," Majlisi relates a *hadith* to the effect that Umm Salamah, one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives, entered her husband's quarters one day to find him weeping and clasping his infant grandson Husain to his breast.

Alarmed, Umm Salamah sought the reason for Muhammad's distress, and he replied that he had just been visited by the angel Gabriel, who had announced to him the future martyrdom of Husain. Umm Salamah suggested, "O Prophet of God, ask Him to lift this fate from Husain."

Muhammad replied, "I have already done so. But God has revealed to me that Husain will attain to a spiritual rank never reached by any other created being. Furthermore, he will have a *shi'ah*, a band of followers, who will attach themselves to him in devotion, and who will therefore benefit from his intercession on their behalf. In addition, the Mahdi will be one of his descendants. Blessings on whoever is one of the friends of Husain! His *shi'ah*, his followers, as God is my witness, will be the triumphant ones on the day of Resurrection."[5]

This passage implies that the tragedy of Karbala was part of the divine economy, that Husain's death was necessary as the means whereby the Islamic community of the Shia might obtain the benefit of intercession.

Majlisi explores this point further in another chapter, "What God Granted Husain as a Reward for His Martyrdom": "God most exalted, as a reward to Husain in exchange for his violent death, granted him that the line of Imams would spring from his descendants, that cures and healing would take place at his tomb, and that prayers offered at his grave would be listened to and answered."[6]

The notion of preordained necessity is conveyed in the form of mythological narrative in the popular Iranian devotional tales associated with the "Cup of Suffering." These stories can be summarized as follows. Because God is omniscient, He knew, even before the act of creating our material world, of all the sins humans would commit. Divine justice would then require that most people be condemned to hellfire. But because God is also all-merciful, He gathered together in heaven the as-yet discarnate souls of all humankind awaiting incarnation and bodily birth, and He commanded that Gabriel appear in their midst.

The angel held in his hands a chalice called the Cup of Suffering. Any souls that sipped from it voluntarily while still in a state of sinless innocence, Gabriel explained, would experience great suffering in their earthly life but would also earn (because of their innocence and the undeserved nature of their suffering) the ability to intercede with God to lessen the punishment for the future sins of humankind.

One after another, various saintly figures stepped forward to sip from Gabriel's cup: Abraham, Jacob, Job, the Prophet Muhammad, Ali, and his wife Fatima. All of them thereby committed themselves to torment in this earthly life. Finally, the Imam Husain stepped forth and drank all that

remained in the chalice, thereby committing himself to being slaughtered at Karbala, but earning as well the power to intercede on behalf of the sinful.[7]

The contemporary Shia historian Syed Husain Jafri likewise interprets the events of Karbala in terms of predestination and the Imam's foreknowledge of the tragedy. In Jafri's view, Husain could easily have summoned sufficient military force to overwhelm the Umayyads, but instead he deliberately renounced the worldly power that might have been his and refused to raise an army, thereby permitting himself to be slain at Karbala. Only through the self-sacrifice of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Jafri argues, could the immoral society of Husain's time be shocked into an awareness of the injustice and depravity prevailing throughout the realm of Islam: "A victory achieved through suffering and sacrifice is everlasting and leaves permanent imprints on man's consciousness."[8]

For the same reason, Jafri continues, Husain took with him on the road to Karbala the women and children of his own family: "Husayn knew that after killing him the Umayyads would make his women and children captives and take them all the way from Kufa to Damascus. This caravan of captives of Muhammad's immediate family would publicize Husayn's message and would force the Muslims' hearts to ponder on the tragedy. It would make the Muslims think of the whole affair and would awaken their consciousness. This is exactly what happened. Husayn succeeded in his purpose."[9]

Seen from this Shia perspective, then, Husain can be said to have offered up his own family as well as himself for the good of the Islamic community (and it should be emphasized that Shia exegesis makes clear that Zaynab and the other family members involved in Karbala also had foreknowledge of their fate and freely acceded thereto).[10] Thus the Imam chose to forego earthly prestige and to expose himself to humiliation as the fulfillment of his destiny. Karbala then was the necessary outcome of Husain's voluntary *kenosis*, or self-emptying.

The comparison with Christian theology implicit in the term *kenosis* is perhaps not inappropriate, for Jafri himself compares the sufferings of Husain with the Passion of Jesus: "Husayn . . . realized that mere force of arms would not have saved Islamic . . . consciousness. To him it needed a shaking and jolting of hearts and feelings. This, he decided, could only be achieved through sacrifice and sufferings. This should not be difficult to understand, especially for those who fully appreciate the . . . great sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the redemption of mankind."[11]

Thus Shia meditations on Karbala can be said to have evolved a distinctive spirituality and ethos linked to motifs of expropriation, persecution, and suffering. Much of this spirituality received its fullest articulation

in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, during the era of Safavid-Ottoman rivalry. As Moojan Momen has demonstrated, religious leaders such as the seventeenth-century scholar Majlisi were eager to encourage in their followers the practice of lamentation rituals that might define them as a community entirely distinct from that of Sunni Islam. The promise of intercession as a reward for *matam* helped stimulate these practices.[12]

Among Shia works of the Safavid era, Majlisi's writings on Karbala are characterized by an insistence on the predestinarian quality of Husain's sacrifice. To support his view of Karbala, Majlisi subjected passages of the Qur'an to *ta'wil*, the process of reading scripture with an eye to its esoteric meaning. In doing so Majlisi articulated a typology in which events from ancient history could be seen to prefigure the life and death of Husain.

In the *Bihar al-anwar* Majlisi expands the Qur'an's relatively brief references to Noah and the Flood so as to establish a link with Karbala. Majlisi's account has Gabriel descend from heaven to direct Noah in the construction of the Ark. First Noah, in accordance with divine instructions, hews lengths of teakwood for planking. The angel then hands Noah a chest filled with nails to be used in the ship's construction.

When the vessel is finally completed, five nails remain in the chest, each of them aglow with a curious light, "just as the glittering stars give forth light on the horizon" (an echo of the celebrated "light verse," Qur'an 24.35). Intrigued, the patriarch asks about these spikes and learns that they symbolize the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, her sons Hasan and Husain, and her husband Ali.

One nail in particular draws Noah's attention, for it glistens as if wet with dew. "'This is blood,' Gabriel explained; and he told Noah the story of Husain and of what the members of his own Muslim community would do to Husain in the future."

The angel instructs Noah to fasten all five spikes to the forepart of his teakwood vessel. This is an appropriate symbolic action, for the Ark typologically foreshadows the salvific action of the Imam's family. Like the *Ahl-e Bayt* (the members of the Prophet's household), this vessel becomes the means whereby a righteous minority achieves deliverance from a fallen world.[13]

Knowledge of the esotericist linking of the Flood with Karbala is by no means limited to an educated few. In Shia shrines as far apart as Damascus and Hyderabad, I have seen inscriptions that proclaim, "Husain is the lamp of guidance and the Ark of salvation."

Devotional works of the premodern era made clear how individuals could gain access to this Ark of salvation. The topic is developed in the early

sixteenth century in the introduction to Wa'iz al-Kashifi's treatise, *The Garden of the Martyrs* (a portion of this passage was quoted in the preceding chapter). He quotes a Muharram lamentation poem and then comments on its application to the lives of Muslims:

> Earth and heaven weep at the death of Husain;
> from the Throne on high to the dirt far below, all beings weep.
> Fish in the ocean depths, birds in the sky's upper heights:
> all weep in mourning for the King of Karbala
> (*dar matam-e Shah-e Karbala mi-geryand*) . . .
>
> Paradise is awarded to anyone [argues Kashifi] who weeps for Husain . . . for the following reason, that every year, when the month of Muharram comes, a multitude of the lovers of the family of the Prophet (*jam'i az muhibban-e Ahl-e Bayt*) renew and make fresh the tragedy of the Martyrs.[14]

"Lovers of the family of the Prophet": here Kashifi defines a Muslim community not in terms of doctrine but rather in terms of emotional disposition and ritual activity: *matam-e Shah-e Karbala*, "mourning for the King of Karbala."

According to Shias I have interviewed in India, scriptural warrant for *matam* is found in the Qur'an (an assertion flatly contradicted by the beliefs of Sunnis I met in Hyderabad, who argued—sometimes with considerable heat—that nowhere in the Qur'an is there any verse licensing the practice of *matam*). In Hyderabad I met numerous times with officers of various *matami guruhan* (the Shia associations that sponsor many of the city's Muharram rituals and self-mortification practices). When I asked them for scriptural references justifying *matam*, they referred me to Qur'an 42.23: "I ask nothing of you save devoted affection with regard to matters of kinship."

According to the men I interviewed, the phrase "matters of kinship" directs our attention to the Prophet's family. What God demands of His people in this verse is that they display "devoted affection" to the Prophet and his descendants. "And *matam*," as an informant from Hyderabad's Imam-e Zamana Mission told me, "is one way of showing love for *Ahl-e Bayt*."

Not only in Hyderabad can this interpretive linking of *matam* with Qur'an 42.23 be found. In 1997 I visited a newly built *matam-serai* (a shrine used especially for Muharram lamentation gatherings) in Chushot, a village with a largely Shia population in Ladakh's Leh district. Prominently displayed in gold lettering over the main entrance gate are the words of

precisely this passage from the Qur'an. Here is hermeneutical strategy made manifest: one quite literally enters the field of polemical interpretation as one steps into the shrine to perform *matam* and enact a very specific understanding of the scriptural verses deployed above the gate.

INTERCESSION AND LAMENTATION RITUALS: RECENT POLEMICAL ISSUES

Until recently, Shia authors and religious authorities have tended to be more concerned with ensuring the survival of their community than with justifying Shia faith and practice to non-Shias. In the twentieth century, however, new complicating factors have arisen. One recent development involves the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Emmanuel Sivan has demonstrated how the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, motivated by a desire to effect a rapprochement with Sunni-oriented revolutionary movements in the Arab Middle East, attempted to minimize doctrinal differences between the Shia and Sunni forms of Islam. Both Sivan and Werner Ende have noted attempts to extend such ecumenism to the area of ritual. In Lebanon during the 1980s Shia religious leaders occasionally attempted to curb *matam* practices so as not to offend potential allies among Sunni communities.[15]

During this same period, at the height of the Iran-Iraq war, a Sunni scholar from Lucknow, Mohammad Manzoor Nomani, published a polemical work intended to undermine Khomeini's appeal to Sunni Muslims by highlighting precisely those aspects of Shia doctrine Nomani knew to be offensive to Sunnis. Predictably he focused much of his criticism on the Imamate and the concept of intercession.

Nomani quoted Shia *hadiths* to the effect that Shias will be forgiven even the most heinous sins as a reward for their devotion to the Prophet and the Imams, who are believed to take on themselves the burden of the sins committed by their followers. Nomani then commented caustically, "Now, is the belief or principle indicated above in any way different from Christianity's doctrine of Atonement?" Having equated Shia devotionalism unflatteringly with Christian piety, Nomani concluded that Shia adherence to the Imams and Shia belief in the Imams' intercessory powers vitiate the essential Islamic doctrine of *tawhid*, since in Nomani's view the Imams' intercession infringes on powers belonging to God alone.[16]

In South Asian Shia communities it seems that the influence of Iranian religious authorities has increased noticeably since 1979. Shias I interviewed in

Hyderabad and Ladakh frequently mentioned the heightened pride they felt in their Shia identity since the success of Khomeini's Islamic Revolution, together with a greater awareness of their Shia identity as something that is global, transnational, and not merely limited to India. This in turn, I would argue, has led to a greater susceptibility—at least among clerics and other educated Shias in India—to Iranian attempts to curb controversial Muharram practices.

But well before the advent of Iranian Khomeinist influence one can find evidence of attempts by India Shia writers to reform Muharram doctrine and rituals. In the context of twentieth-century South Asia, many such writings by Shia authors on intercession and *matam* are characterized by universalist appeals to nature and reason. The broadening of Shia apologetics to include such categories might well reflect influence from the former political situation of Shias earlier in the century in British India. As a minority in largely Hindu communities, Indian Shias often had to appeal for protection to the colonial government. An example of such writing published during the Raj is a Qur'an commentary composed in 1931 by a Shia author named Badshah Husain. The following passage, intended as a defense of Muharram practices, shows the influence of Muslim modernist thinkers ranging from Muhammad Abduh to Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan:

> To this day, when the progress of culture ought to have quickened sensibility for poor men's sufferings, the Great War has shown how much callousness persists in the minds of the races . . . What is the worth of a religion if it cannot devise a suitable psychological remedy for all this? And has any religion done it? Why, the remedy is simple enough; only it was reserved for Islam (true Islam, I mean, according to the Shia sect) to enforce it. If sympathetic feelings are naturally dull, why, make them sharp by suitable exercise. Make it incumbent on every man to commemorate some great tragedy and weep over it. That means realizing the distress in the fullest sense of realizing, with the rousing of all appropriate tender emotions. The development of keen sympathetic feelings and the sharpness of sensibility against acts of callousness is then a physical necessity. How finely is this provided for in our religion in its insistence on mourning over Husain—the great tragedy of Karbala—true, real mourning with torrents of tears! Can any such thing be found in other religions? And can such religions be called perfect in any sense without some such thing?[17]

Badshah Husain does not flinch from tackling the related controversy surrounding intercession. Rather than base his argument solely on the Shia

tradition and Shia authorities, he attempts to demonstrate the reasonableness of the doctrine by appealing to universal aspects of the human condition. Husain begins with a traditional philological analysis of the term *shafa'ah* (the word used in the Qur'an to denote intercession); but he then proceeds to a reassessment of the doctrine:

> [Commentary on surah 2.48] *Shafaat* comes from the root *Shafa* (pairing) and is not only justifiable but necessary when there is real pairing of souls in spiritual union by ties of love . . .
>
> [Commentary on surah 2.255] Intercession is entirely a matter of attachment of souls by ties of love. This is well expressed by the Arabic word *Shafaat* (joining). It must be stated, however, that of all self-delusions it is that of love that is the commonest . . . No one can be sure that he really loves a man unless he finds in his heart a never-ending desire to do at any cost to himself some act of obligation to him. So no one can be sure that he loves the Prophet or the Imams unless he feels really grieved to have done something which, he knows, must have grieved them.[18]

In conformity with Wa'iz al-Kashifi's description of Muharram mourners as *muhibban-e Ahl-e Bayt* (lovers of the family of the Prophet), Badshah Husain emphasizes the personal and intimately reciprocal nature of the relationship between the individual believer and the beloved Imams. But this author goes on to warn of the moral responsibilities engendered by such "ties of love": the sinner must experience compunction for his transgressions in order for the relationship to be a real one and for intercession to be effective.

The same cautionary note has been sounded in more recent publications. While in a Shia-owned bookshop in Hyderabad, I came across a pamphlet entitled *The Leader of Martyrs*. The author records a *hadith* to the effect that as Husain lay dying at Karbala he heard a divine voice proclaiming: "O Husain! Comfort yourself in that, for your sake, I shall forgive from among the number of sinners those who are your lovers, so that you may feel gratified." The author comments on this *hadith* as follows:

> A question may herewith arise whether the promised forgiveness is a free license for the friends of the Imams to commit whatever sins they like. If so, then the threatened punishment for misdeeds in so many Ayats of the Holy Quran would become null and void.

> The fact is that a true lover is the one who does nothing that displeases his beloved. If all the great sacrifices made by the Imam were for the purpose of saving Islam and to uphold its rules of *Sharia*, then to flout them would be tantamount to displease [sic] our beloved Imam.[19]

Educated Shias with whom I spoke acknowledged the potential for abuses attendant on popular attitudes toward Muharram liturgies. They knew of Shias who acted as if the zealous performance of *matam* at Muharram compensated for the failure to observe religious obligations during the rest of the year. In July 1991, I interviewed Agha Muhammad Abidi, the Iranian vice consul in Hyderabad, who likewise acknowledged this problem. "Some Shias," he told me, "wrongly feel that during the other ten months of the year [that is, aside from Muharram and Safar] they can do what they want, as long as they perform *matam* during Muharram. We need to educate people concerning this."

And a young physician named Abbas Ali Jowkar, with whom I served as a volunteer first aid worker outside Hyderabad's chief flagellation shrine on Ashura, 1991, offered the wry opinion, in an interval of quiet between bandaging wounded flagellants, "For many people, the *majlis* [the Muharram liturgy during which the Karbala martyrs are mourned] is a box-office attraction. For most people, the feeling is: if I weep for Husain, I get Paradise."

The moral significance of the *majlis* is addressed in a recent British publication, a children's pamphlet entitled *Moharram and Karbala*. Its publishers explain in the preface that their intention is to provide a meaningful introduction to Muharram for the Anglophone children of Urdu-speaking Shia immigrants who have settled in England and America. The author, Sultana Furqan Khan, rather than focusing at all on intercession, organizes her theme as follows: "*Majlises* serve many purposes, such as: 1. Discipline—individual/collective; 2. Refreshing our knowledge of Islam; 3. Develop a sense of responsibility and sacrifice toward each other and toward Allah, our creator; 4. To demonstrate Prophet's (S.A.W.) and his Ahle-Bayte's ever readiness to serve and save Islam at any cost."[20]

Thus in this new assessment Husain becomes a model to be imitated and an exemplar of moral self-discipline. But the question of intercession is passed over in silence. So, too, in a pamphlet entitled *Imamiyah diniyat* ("Principles of the Shia Faith"), which is part of an educational series on Shiism recently published in Lucknow. I found copies on sale at kiosks in the main bazaar of Kargil (Ladakh) during the 1997 Muharram season. The pamphlet's chapter on *'azadari* (mourning for the Karbala martyrs) states that Muharram lamentation occurs "in order to celebrate the memory of the Imam

Husain's martyrdom." It also notes that many non-Muslims join in mourning for Husain. But the text makes no mention of intercession as a reward for mourning.[21]

Two sociologists from Lucknow University, Nadeem Hasnain and Abrar Husain, published a study in 1988 entitled *Shias and Shia Islam in India*. The authors discuss Muharram lamentations in some detail, but as with the works cited above, they omit any reference to intercession. Instead, in a section called "Husain's Martyrdom and the Emotional Integration of Indian Society," Hasnain and Husain describe Muharram mourning as a nation-building tool. They point out that in many parts of India Hindus join with Muslims in venerating the Karbala martyrs, "a fine example of our common cultural heritage and composite culture of our pluralistic society."[22]

Thus within South Asia a trend seems to be at work in recent Shia publications intended for public consumption: a tendency to downplay doctrinally contentious issues such as intercession and instead to emphasize both the social usefulness of Muharram and the need for ethical responsibility on the part of the individual participant. This would seem to be part of a larger development at work among the contemporary South Asian Shia communities I have visited, namely a heightened self-consciousness and a greater concern for the image of Shiism, for the ways in which the Shia tradition might be perceived by outsiders.

This self-consciousness has increasingly been extended over the last several years not only to controversial doctrinal issues such as intercession but also to the practice of *matam*, especially the more spectacular and bloody forms of *matam* like *qameh-zani* ("dagger-striking," in which the mourner gashes himself on the forehead or scalp with a knife or other bladed implement) and *zanjir-zani* (the *zanjir* is a flail comprising several entwined chains each of which terminates in a long metal blade. In *zanjir-zani* the mourner scourges himself on the head or back). Both in Hyderabad and Leh (the Ladakhi district capital) I found that *matam* is very popular, especially among the hundreds of teenaged boys and young men who make up a large percentage of Muharram processionists.

In Hyderabad and Leh, as in many other urban population centers in India, there are Shia *guruhan* or associations that organize public Muharram marches. Some participants perform *zanjir-zani*, others simple *hath ka matam* (the more common form of ritual mourning, involving rhythmic repetitive breast-beating with the palm of one's hand). Yet in both cities there are also numerous critics of the practice of *matam*, both within and outside the Shia community.

Elsewhere I have described criticisms I encountered during Muharram fieldwork in Hyderabad in 1989 and 1991: that the *matam* performances

sponsored by the *matami guruhan* are too planned and too regimented, whereas authentic *matam* should be an unrehearsed spontaneous outpouring of grief; that the *matam* done during Ashura processions is no more than "showing off" in public; that the young men's communal *matam*, performed during five-hour marches on the streets of Hyderabad's Old City neighborhoods, is too much like dance, with all of that artform's attendant connotations of sexual license and loss of moral self-restraint.[23]

But here I will focus on my more recent experiences, namely in Ladakh during the Muharram seasons of 1995, 1996, and 1997. One of the first Shias to welcome me into his home when I arrived in Leh township was a man named Reza (a pseudonym), whom I introduced in chapter seven. In his late thirties, a kiosk cigarette vendor by profession, Reza is an officer in Leh's Imamia Youth Federation and is therefore very active in planning the *majalis* (Muharram lamentation gatherings) and public Ashura processions that annually draw participants to the town from neighboring villages.

Reza told me that although he performs *hath ka matam* in Leh's Ashura processions, he never engages in *zanjir-zani*. "It's wrong to risk hurting yourself like that," he said in the course of one conversation over dinner at his home. He quickly added that he didn't mean to judge those Shias who do scourge themselves and draw blood.

Talking about *matam* led Reza to compare Shia self-mortification with that practiced by Ladakhi Buddhists (the majority of Leh's population is Buddhist). Buddhists, too, inflict hardships on their bodies, he asserted.

He stood up to demonstrate. "This is the way they do pilgrimage when they visit one of their holy places." Hands joined as if in prayer, he bowed his head and squatted, then lay prostrate on the floor of his parlor. Abruptly he stood, counted out three paces forward, then lowered himself once more. "And they do this in very cold weather," he said, looking impressed, "lying on the ground like that for every three steps they take." When I asked him why Buddhists do this, he answered, "To purify themselves and make up for their sins."

I then asked whether Shias do *matam* for the same reason. "Not primarily," came the reply. "They do this to remember Husain." But my informant went on to note that there are many traditional sayings to the effect that those who remember Husain during Muharram will meet him in Paradise. He hurried to add, "It's also necessary to do *namaz* [daily prayer], *zakat* [almsgiving], and so on. And *niyyat* [intention] is essential in performing *matam*: if someone does *matam* to show off how strong he is, then his *matam* becomes unacceptable."

Reza's comments mirror those of many Muharram participants I interviewed: they acknowledge a link between intercession and *matam*, but they insist that the intercessory merit one earns is mediated by the sincerity of one's intentions in performing the action.

Reza in any case had a sense of humor with regard to this topic. One chilly and windy afternoon during the 1997 Muharram season I went looking for him at his kiosk in the bazaar but found the stall locked and shuttered. A half-hour later I found him in a side street hurrying from house to house. In his hand was a hastily composed letter of invitation asking members of the Anjuman-e Imamia to come to a meeting that evening at the Leh Matam-Serai. Appended to the invitation was a list of names of Anjuman members.

"I was asked just a couple of hours ago to find everyone on this invitation sheet and ask them in person to please come to tonight's meeting," he said, and he looked tired. He showed me the letter. I counted over forty names on the list. "A lot of work," I sympathized. "I don't need to beat myself with a *zanjir* for Muharram," he smiled, holding up the list. "For me, this is like *matam*."

In one of our conversations Reza mentioned that he had heard that some *maulvi* had issued a fatwa on the topic of *zanjir-zani*. For further information he referred me to Sheikh Mirza Husain, the prayer leader responsible for the principal Shia shrine in town, the Leh Matam-Serai. In an interview at the shrine in May 1997, I asked Sheikh Mirza about *zanjir-zani*, and he told me that he opposed the practice, for two reasons.

First, he said, the focus of Islam should be the Five Pillars, the universal practices mandated for all Muslims. Second, the impression bloody *matam* makes on outsiders is bound to be negative. He, too, had heard of the fatwa mentioned by my friend Reza. Sheikh Mirza knew it had been issued by an Iranian authority but was unsure of the exact source. He suggested that if I had the time to go to the town of Kargil, I might inquire at the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust.

Kargil is a moral stronghold of Shiism. Located in western Ladakh, hard against the border with Pakistan, it has a reputation for austerity, for being a place where dancing, games of polo, and other frivolous pleasures are frowned on.[24]

"In Kargil," a Buddhist day-laborer told me, "you can get arrested if you're seen smiling during the *jalus* [the Muharram procession]." He was from Leh but had done work occasionally in Kargil loading trucks. Whether an exaggeration or not, the man's statement says something about the town's reputation.

A Christian Indian I met, a congregant in Leh's Moravian Mission Church, told me that if I went to Kargil I'd see that there were no dogs on the street. "Dogs are ritually polluting," he said, "so Kargilis don't allow any in town." And Kargilis, he added, look down on rural Shias who keep dogs to defend their flocks against wild beasts: shepherds are considered inferior because their contact with animals reduces them to a recurrent state of impurity.

Halal-kattar was how one Shia resident of Leh described the Kargilis: dietary-rule zealots, fanatics for purity codes. When they found out that I was planning a trip to Kargil, several Shia friends in Leh warned me bluntly that Kargil township is a much less welcoming place than Leh. When I asked why this was so, they told me, "We have the big airport here. We mix with Buddhists and tourists all the time. Kargil is much more closed off from the world."

My friends were right. Kargil seemed to me (on the basis of a three-day visit, admittedly an insecure foundation for hard-and-fast judgments) much less open to foreigners than Leh. I won't call it provincial: after all, Kargil does look towards a larger world, that of the Islamic Republic of Iran. But it did strike me as *tang nazar*: "narrow of view," monocular, small-minded.

And it was in Kargil that I had a particularly unpleasant encounter at a bookstall, where the proprietor glared at me with suspicion when I asked to look at his titles on Shiism. He hesitated in exposing the books to my hands, torn as he was between the desire to shield his faith by blocking the sale and the urge to make maximum money by overcharging a foreigner. He chose greed. But he did so with ill grace, making plain by his manner what he thought of me as a *ferenghee*, a non-Muslim, an outsider. Through all this, neighborhood idlers—young men with not enough to do—stood about smirking and mimicked my Urdu. My one consolation (aside from securing the books I needed): the indignant sympathy I received when I told the story back in Leh.

Despite the difficulties, I learned a great deal from the expedition to Kargil. The town is perched in a mountainous region near the so-called Line of Control, close to the disputed border between India and Pakistan (since April 1997 the city has been subjected to sporadic artillery shelling by the Pakistani military). According to my Ladakhi Shia informants, Kargil township is a center for Shia *tabligh* (religious, educational, and missionary activities), much of which is said by my informants to be funded by the Iranian government.

In May 1997 I decided to take Sheikh Mirza's suggestion and go to Kargil to inquire about the *matam* fatwa. My wife, Jody, accompanied me

during the 1997 season. Together we hired a jeep (piloted by a solemn young Kargili Shia, who brought his teenaged brother for company). When I expressed doubts about the safety of the Leh-to-Kargil highway ("highway" is the courtesy term for this unpaved mountain track, too narrow, for much of its length, for two-lane traffic), the boys told us we had nothing to fear.

Of all the things we met with on the road—herders with flocks of great silent yaks; a stalled freight truck blocking both directions on a hairpin curve, around which our jeep crept, bare inches from the cliff-edge, our wheels showering gravel into the sheer precipice-drop below, while the truck drivers watched with interest and cheered once we'd cleared the curve (I had the feeling they would have been equally well-entertained had we dropped over the edge); the Fotu-La Pass (altitude: 14,000 feet), where our vehicle broke down and we shivered for hours while trans-Himalayan winds rocked the jeep—of all these things, I will linger over one incident only: our tea stop in Mulbekh.

Mulbekh is a village along the highway not far from Kargil. It is famous for an ancient roadside carving incised into a rockface some thirty feet in height. The carving depicts Bodhisattva Maitreya, the "Buddha to come," a figure of salvation. Once a pilgrimage site, this place is still a focus of worship today. Before the rock stands a chapel, exuberantly painted with Tibetan deities.

More attractive to us, after the long road from Leh, was a shop offering hot cardamom milk-tea. Jody and I sat outside the shop admiring the carving while our two Kargilis lifted the jeep's hood and played about with the engine. I ordered four cups of tea, asking the server to take two over to our drivers.

A moment later the server came back. The cups of tea remained on his tray, untouched. "They didn't want them," he said.

I walked over to the jeep, asked if there was something wrong with the tea, if I could offer them something else. The boys shrugged. *Ham Buddhist ke hathon se chai kebhi nebin lete.* This from the older boy: "We never take tea from the hands of Buddhists." I remembered the term I'd heard in Leh: *balal kattar,* purity fanatics.

It was only on the return trip that I spotted another suggestive bit of evidence for the state of Muslim-Buddhist relations in Mulbekh: two refreshment stalls, one on each side of the road, facing each other on the village outskirts. One was marked with a sign that read 'Hindu-Buddhist Tea Stall.' Nearby was posted an English-language leaflet that read: "Our demands. Stop conversion of Buddhist women to Islam." The other tea

shop was decorated with poster-portraits of the Ayatollah Khomeini and a black Muharram banner on which was painted the verses of a famous Urdu couplet: "The killing of Husain in reality meant the death of Yazid; Islam becomes alive once more each time a Karbala occurs."

Mulbekh, I thought, merited its own study: local tea politics.

But it was in Kargil that we met a religious authority who made the entire trip worthwhile. On our second day there, we asked various shopkeepers about the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust. Astonishment and suspicious stares were all we earned in response, until we met a generous-minded clerk in a place named the Najaf Book Store and Photo Studio. He had us wait while he made several telephone calls in muttered Balti. Arguing on our behalf, I guessed.

"I will take you," he said. Without fuss he locked up the shop, ushered us out onto the street, and led us to our goal. His courtesy made me feel better about Kargil.

One of the primary religious centers in Kargil, the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust is a two-story building located by the bus station near the town's main bazaar. We were kept waiting some forty-five minutes in the trust's front office while various employees quizzed us about our subjects of inquiry. When they had established to their satisfaction that we were sincerely interested in learning about points of Shia doctrine and practice, they took us to an upstairs study and introduced us to a *maulvi* named Sheikh Anwar Husain Sharaf al-Din.

Although relatively young (in his late twenties or early thirties), Sheikh Anwar was treated with considerable deference by his colleagues in the course of our conversation, in part because of his superb knowledge of Arabic (his language of choice for our interview), in part because of his studies in Qom (an Iranian city celebrated for its curricula in theology and law) at an institution called al-Hawza al-'Ilmiyah.

Sheikh Anwar was here in Kargil, the clerks told us, to be home for the Muharram holy days and to help in preaching sermons and presiding over local *majalis*. (Worth noting, too, is that Sheikh Anwar's educational experience is not all that unusual. Dozens of Ladakhi Shias—several hundred, according to some local informants—mostly from Kargil, a few from Leh, are said to be currently studying in Iran. Shias I met in Ladakh asserted that the Iranian government gives these students financial aid to make possible their stay in Iran.)

In response to my inquiry Sheikh Anwar confirmed that in fact there did exist a recent fatwa relating to *matam*. It comprised an opinion issued during the 1994 Muharram season by the Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei,

the spiritual leader of the Iranian Islamic Republic. Sheikh Anwar was kind enough to present me with a copy of the relevant text, and he pointed out the pertinent passages.

In his pronouncement of 7 Muharram 1415 (A.D. 1994), Ayatollah Khamenei declared "unlawful and forbidden" acts of *matam* performed in public involving the use of weapons to shed one's blood. In a previous chapter I quoted a portion of the relevant text from this fatwa. Khamenei's primary concern was the harm that might befall the image of Shia Islam if outsiders saw Muharram mourners scourging themselves: "It is not a question of individual or physical harm," he argued, "but of great injuries linked to the reputation of Islam."[25]

Worth noting, however, is the following concession that Khamenei included in his decree: "Of course any persons who in years past have engaged in *qameh-zani* [self-scourging with a bladed implement] out of love and sincere devotion, are entitled to reward, God willing, and are deserving of divine compensation, on account of the intention underlying their action."[26] In effect Ayatollah Khamenei has added here a grandfather clause acknowledging the old tradition of *matam* in relation to intercessory merit.

In our conversation Sheikh Anwar was careful not to question the sincerity of those flagellants who perform *matam* in hopes of earning intercessory merit. Nonetheless he made it clear that being an educated member of the Shia community entails socially responsible behavior on the part of the individual. Therefore one should not engage in actions (such as *zanjiri-matam*) for one's private benefit if these actions risk harming the reputation of the Shia faith in the eyes of the outside world.

On the road from Kargil back to Leh I reflected on what we had encountered over the preceding few days, namely, a hierarchy for the diffusion of new interpretations of the Shia tradition of lamentation, involving a five-step process:

1. issuance of a fatwa by Iran's leading ayatollah;
2. study of the ayatollah's published opinion by Kargili maulvis resident in Qom;
3. promulgation of the opinion by these same Kargilis when they return home to Ladakh for preaching and other religious work at Kargil township's Khomeini Trust;
4. transmission of this fatwa from Kargil to Leh, partly through the medium of Kargili maulvis, a number of whom pass through Leh during Muharram and preach in Leh's chief *matam-serai*;

5. educational work within Leh by members of the town's own Shia community, including Sheikh Mirza, leader of Leh's *matam-serai*, and certain members (especially the officers) of Shia associations in and around Leh township.

In Leh the Shias who seemed most inclined to criticize traditional lamentation practices were the more-educated and affluent members of the community. They also tended to be older than the individuals who engage in the bloodier forms of *matam* (the blade-and-chain wielders by and large are teenaged boys and young men in their early twenties).

Syed Naqi Shah, principal of the Imamiyah Mission School in the village of Chushot, provided one of the most thoughtful critiques of *matam* I encountered in Ladakh. He himself accompanies a group of boys from his school to Leh every year to march in the town's Ashura procession. The boys perform bare-handed *matam* in time to the chant of *nauhas*. The Mission School's faculty includes two Shia *maulvis* who teach these pupils the verses (both in Urdu and Balti) to be recited in the annual procession.

During an interview in May 1997 at the Imamiyah Mission School I asked Syed Naqi whether individuals can in fact earn intercessory merit through Muharram weeping and *matam*. In reply he said, "Yes, but one is not automatically freed of all one's sins just by doing *matam*. There are terms and conditions to be met." He explained that the actions associated with Muharram mourning have the capacity to elevate us to a morally responsible state: "When you're carefree, according to Ja'far al-Sadiq [the sixth Shia Imam], you think about nothing. But weeping makes us reflect. We remember our sins. This leads to *tauba* [repentance]. When we feel this we can be forgiven."

This schoolteacher's remarks (what he himself termed a "psychological perspective") constitute what I would characterize as part of an attempt to reform Muharram practice by emphasizing the interior mental states that should accompany *matam*. But other attempts to reform Muharram practices are more bluntly direct and physical. In both Hyderabad and Ladakh I have frequently seen senior members of various Shia associations reprimanding younger men who have bloodied themselves excessively in doing *zanjir-zani*. Trying to restrain a teenager who insists on the zealous public *zanjir* display prohibited by the Ayatollah Khamenei can be more than a bit hazardous. The following story illustrates what I mean.

During the 1996 Ashura procession in Leh I accompanied my friend Reza (who, as I mentioned above, is an officer in the Imamia Youth Federation) for some distance through the main bazaar along the length of the procession route. He himself was performing simple bare-handed *matam*

together with his middle-aged colleagues in the group, while keeping careful watch over a group of teenagers who were beginning to strike themselves on the head with razors and chains.

Reza, as I noted earlier, is critical of Muharram flagellation. He had been the first to tell me of the fatwa forbidding the public performance of bloody *matam*. I dropped back for a moment to take photographs and lost sight of my friend in the crowd. When I looked for him again he was gone. "He had to leave," one of his colleagues told me.

When I saw Reza the next day I found out why he had had to leave. He had a nasty cut over one eye, acquired, he told me, when he tried to restrain one of the *zanjir*-wielding boys who had gotten carried away in his zeal. Reza had caught the backswing.

From Iran to Ladakh, from Qom to Kargil to Leh, the Ayatollah Khamenei's fatwa had been transmitted. Here on the city streets the observer could see in action an attempt to implement the ban. Also clear to see was that reformation carries a cost.

In the town of Leh I had the opportunity to talk with Shia teenagers who defended Muharram self-flagellation. These young men listed what they saw as a whole series of people who disapprove of bloody *matam*. My informants referred to local *maulvis*, municipal health officials, older Shias in the community, and "outsiders." When I asked for clarification as to the identity of the latter, they referred to preachers "from outside," trained in Iran and elsewhere, who pass through Leh at Muharram and denounce flagellation in sermons. Several young men expressed resentment at what they see as interference.

When I played mullah's advocate and repeated the argument about the risk that bloody *matam* might worsen Shia Islam's image, one young man replied heatedly, "*Zanjiri-matam* is a chance to show the world what happened at Karbala." He went on to elaborate: "Ashura is so special that on that day we should do everything we can to remember Husain." His heart, he said, impelled him to such strong feelings. Then he added a revealing statement: "I'm the owner of my own body."

The public practice of self-flagellation, then, in the face of disapproval, becomes an assertion of personal freedom. Thus the tensions dividing critics and defenders of bloody *matam* can be construed in various ways, as an issue between laity and clerics, the uneducated and the educated, the young and the old; but it is also very much an issue of control.

Despite criticism from ayatollahs, mullahs, and educated Shias alike, bloody *matam* continues to be popular in both Hyderabad and Ladakh. The reasons for this popularity involve factors not yet sufficiently taken into

account by Shia reformers. Earlier I stated that at the popular level Shia communities have tended to define themselves as those Muslims who surpass all others in their love for the Prophet's family and his descendants the Imams. To engage in excessive and apparently irrational behavior, to hurt oneself physically through actions such as *qameh-zani* and *zanjir-zani*, is to show that one deserves to be ranked among the *muhibban-e Ahl-e Bayt* (to borrow Kashifi's devotional phrase), "the lovers of the family of the Prophet," those Muslims who merit Paradise through their lamentation. Thus Muharram self-mortification entails a demonstrative aspect directed to an audience within the Shia population: disregard for one's own safety validates one's claim to intimate self-abnegating love for the Prophet's family.

Worth recalling in this context are certain *nauha* verses that have been quoted in previous chapters. They comprise the lyrics of poems that are commonly chanted as accompaniment to the public performance of *matam*:

> Farid, may there always be *matam* for Husain;
> let there be no sorrow save sorrow for Husain.
> Until the Day of Resurrection, let there remain
> only this season and no other:
> Hail beloved Husain, O beloved Husain.[27]

> In our eyes, even now is that time when Ali's son fell
> bathed in his own blood.
> On the battlefield, there resounded the complaint
> and cries for help of one afflicted.
> Even if streaks of blood now flow from our breasts,
> may our hands never cease:
> Let this *matam* continue on behalf of the one who was wronged,
> for as long as Fatima's cry comes forth.[28]

> O young men of lamentation,
> you embody the prayer of everyone's heart.
> Truly, till the gathering of humankind on the Day of Resurrection,
> there will continue from breasts the sound of *matam*.[29]

> Today those of Karbala once more become our guests . . .
> This sound of *matam* is a message of wakefulness;
> for this reason flows the lifeblood in our veins.
> Our life consists of lamentation for the king . . .

O exalted one, in this sorrow there will be a people
who will beat their breasts.[30]

Characteristic of such poems are the following three points:

1. The verses evoke not only the event of Karbala in the past but also the liturgical commemoration of that event in the present.
2. Rather than emphasize Husain's intercession in exchange for Muharram lamentation, the poems refer far more frequently to the group of Muharram participants performing the action of mourning. Implicit in such references is a definition of Shias as a community that has covenanted to perform *matam*: "for this reason flows the lifeblood in our veins. Our life consists of lamentation for the king . . . in this sorrow there will be a people who will beat their breasts."
3. Even though in actual practice most Muharram participants limit themselves to simple bare-handed *hath ka matam*, these poems evince admiration for *matam* in its most spectacular and excessive forms: "Even if streaks of blood now flow from our breasts, may our hands never cease: Let this *matam* continue on behalf of the one who was wronged."

In my chapters on Darjeeling and Ladakh, I demonstrated that Sunnis do sometimes participate in Muharram. But in both settings I observed that Sunnis refrain from the ritual action of striking themselves. Again and again, in interviews with South Asian Muslims, not only in Hyderabad and Ladakh, but in Lahore, Delhi, and Darjeeling, I have been told that *matam* is a practice that is primarily and characteristically Shia. *Matam* is something Shias do; and the bloodier forms of *matam*, *qameh-zani* and *zanjir-zani*, comprise *matam* par excellence. Thus as an outward-directed demonstration, bloody *matam* serves to demarcate forcefully Shia gatherings from non-Shia, whether Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu. This is a practice that can be especially useful in a setting such as India, where Shias are a minority population within Islam, and where Islam in turn is the religion of a minority that sees itself as surrounded by Hindu and Buddhist majorities.

In conclusion, what I have witnessed in recent years in various South Asian localities is an attempt by the higher levels of the Shia religious hierarchy to rein in both doctrinal excesses (relating to intercession) and the more controversial forms of the ritual mourning linked to this doctrine. The regulation of doctrine and ritual is undertaken for the sake of issues involving the image of Shiism abroad and international rapprochement

with non-Shia Muslim communities. But at the popular level bloody *matam* persists precisely because such practices serve to mark Shias as distinct from other communities within their immediate environment. In its performative and demonstrative aspects, then, perhaps it can be said that all ritual, like politics, is local.

NINE

The Day of the Lion: A Ladakhi Shia Ritual Determined by the Zodiacal Calendar

TRAVELER'S TALE. GETTING THERE: BY CAR FROM KASHMIR TO LADAKH DURING THE KARGIL CRISIS

I knew my problems had taken a turn for the worse when I saw that the camouflage netting had been removed from the artillery that lined the highway. Gun crews crouched tensely behind each howitzer; loaders rammed home shells. And then I saw an officer raise his arm and slash the air in an unmistakable signal: fire.

I found myself on Kashmir's National Highway One-A because of a research project I had planned for the summer of 1999. I intended to return to Ladakh to investigate reports I had heard in previous years from Ladakhi informants involving a ritual observance called "the Day of the Lion" (discussed in more detail below).

I had first arranged this trip the previous fall. Since then, of course, had come what Indian newspapers called "the Kargil Crisis": armed militants had crossed the border from Pakistan. From mountain heights overlooking the Line of Control they were bombarding the highway that links Srinagar, Kashmir's capital, with the Ladakhi towns of Kargil and Leh.

I hesitated. Did it make sense to proceed with my trip? Wisely or not, I had decided to go ahead. Maybe the fighting would be over by the time I arrived.

I was wrong. When I reached Delhi airport in July 1999, the mood was one of emergency. My flight from Delhi to Leh had been cancelled. In fact no planes had flown into Ladakh for the previous four days.

Hundreds of passengers, angry and frustrated, crowded the information counter. Unseasonably harsh monsoon storms in Ladakh, we were told, had washed out the flights. The clerks could not say when service would resume.

Any alternative, I decided, was preferable to waiting around in Delhi. From previous years in India I knew that there was a land route into Ladakh via Kashmir, by highway from Srinagar into the Himalayas. But was the highway open?

The airport manager in Delhi telephoned on my behalf. The Border Security Force, he told me, claimed that Highway One-A was functioning despite the incursions from Pakistan. "But," he cautioned, "it seems there might be difficulties."

There might be difficulties, I reasoned, no matter what I did. On the spot I traded my ticket to Leh for a seat on a flight leaving that morning for Srinagar. I made the flight with ten minutes to spare.

In the plane I sat beside a Danish officer from the United Nations force stationed in Kashmir. "Technically, we're observers, not peacekeepers," he said. He explained what that meant: in one of the more violence-torn of the world's cities, he and his soldiers were required to go about unarmed. He talked of what it felt like to rush weaponless to the scene of a confrontation between Kashmiri independence marchers and Indian policemen, hoping one's presence would be enough to defuse a riot, afraid of being shot by some hothead.

"Don't wander about in the Old City," he warned. "Too dangerous. But Dal Lake is still beautiful, and safe enough."

He was right, on both counts. For two nights I stayed in a houseboat on Dal Lake, and I found my peace disturbed only by the vendors who paddled alongside, their skiffs heavy with carpets, jewelry, and other tourist goods.

At twilight that first night I hired a *shikara*, a paddleboat outfitted with a canopy and cushioned bench, and had myself rowed out for a tour of the lake. Nearby were Moghul pavilions in marble; in the distance, mountains rising up from the shore.

The rowers took me out among clusters of water lilies, where strange pink flowers blossomed wildly. Birdlife was abundant: hawks, ducks, kingfishers darting low over the water. From Hazratbal mosque across the lake came the evening call to prayer. Easy to understand why Srinagar had been a holiday center for the British in the old days of the Raj.

Times change. My only company on the lake that night was a boatload of Border Security Force militiamen. They passed, eyed us, then continued on their patrol.

Through the houseboat owners I arranged the next stage of my journey: a car from Srinagar to Leh, Ladakh's district capital. National Highway One-A, the road connecting Kashmir with Ladakh, boasts a grand name for a rutted one-lane track too narrow to permit a safe flow of two-way traffic. The road is both magnificent and terrifying: blind mountain hairpin turns, Himalayan vistas of ice ridges, precipice-drops to rushing waters far below.

Dangerous even in peacetime, this road, with its summer traffic of nose-to-tail freight trucks: for the Srinagar-to-Leh route is used to deliver a year's worth of supplies in a matter of weeks to the people of Ladakh, a land that is snowlocked from October to June.

But in the summer of 1999 Highway One-A was yet more hazardous. Military traffic claimed right of way, hurtling to the Kargil Front. And from across the Line of Control Pakistan directed cannon fire from the mountain heights onto the road below.

I was lucky in my driver, a Kashmiri Sunni named Manzoor Ahmed. Silver-bearded, silent, and deliberate in his driving, Mr. Ahmed was a reassuring presence. And he possessed in abundance the prime virtue needed for safe passage of this mountain highway: patience.

We left Srinagar before dawn in an Ambassador sedan, an ancient car, dented but serviceable. My last glimpse of the city was Dal Lake in the gray light, with men unrolling prayer rugs on the shore for early morning devotions.

We made good time the first few hours. Virtually no traffic on the road, save foot patrols of soldiers with mine-detecting gear.

"Sweeping for terrorist bombs," explained Mister Ahmed. Unsettling, but nevertheless I enjoyed the scenery: pine forests and glacier-topped hills. Besides, we had the road almost all to ourselves. It seemed the journey wouldn't be all that bad.

My assessment changed once we reached Sonamarg checkpoint. The officer commanding the roadblock waved us off the highway to a dusty open field and told us we'd have to wait until a southbound convoy had passed. Five-hundred and thirteen trucks, armored personnel carriers, and trailer-mounted artillery. Five hours we waited while the procession trundled by.

Meanwhile—to my alarm—one freight truck after another arrived from Srinagar, all of them, like us, headed northeast along the highway to Ladakh, all of them eager to be the first to clear the checkpoint. I counted two hundred

trucks in that parking lot. I didn't fancy being caught in that throng and having to follow some diesel-belching monster all the way up the road.

Mr. Ahmed read my mind. "We will do what we can," he said quietly. He had already parked as close to the road as the militia would allow. Hours passed. A hot sun burned down. Drivers dozed under trucks.

Then: shrill police whistles. Barrier gates stood open. The convoy was past! Shouting and running: men scrambled into their cabs. Trucks lurched forward in low gear.

Our Ambassador shot ahead, faltered, stalled. Freight behemoths closed the distance behind us. Our engine started again and we plunged on toward the gate at the end of the lot. Like the chariot race, I thought, in *Ben-Hur.*

Then a big orange Tata truck overtook us, left us behind. Across the tailgate was painted a brave road name: The Flying Sikh. An appropriate title: he was flying right past us, first out of the gate.

But the Flying Sikh surprised us with an act of highway gallantry. He cleared the lot and suddenly pulled over. The driver waved us forward: he was letting our car escape the crush of freight trucks. As we passed I looked up and glimpsed an electric-crimson turban and a grinning bearded face.

Smooth driving, after that, and no more roadblocks. But once we crossed the Zoji-La Pass we began to hear weapons fire echoing from the mountains around us. We were nearing the village of Drass, the current flashpoint in the Kargil Crisis. 'Coldest place in India,' were the words printed on my tourist map. "But presently a hotspot," was Mr. Ahmed's quiet witticism when I showed him the map. "You will see."

Our first clear warning of what was in store came a few miles later. We passed clusters of Indian military trucks and tanks berthed beside the road, shrouded in camouflage netting. Then, just before Drass, we came upon a row of at least twenty artillery pieces stationed in a ditch a mere ten yards to our east, their netting removed, their barrels elevated and cleared for action. The artillery was pointed in our general direction, across the highway, up into the hills controlled by Pakistan beyond the Line of Control.

They won't fire, I told myself, while there's traffic in the way.

Wrong. Even as we passed, the gun emplacement let loose a salvo. Twenty pieces at once, firing over our heads, up into the hills. Deafening.

I had to admire Mr. Ahmed. While I flinched, he drove, calm and unflappable. "Long range fire," he said. "No problem. They're not aiming at us."

I learned from his example. On the other side of Drass we passed another line of howitzers, and they, too, fired as we drove by. This time I was able to study the muzzle flashes with a bit more detachment.

Nevertheless I noticed that my driver gave the car more speed. "Advisable to go quickly here," he said, and he pointed to a bombed-out truck on the highway shoulder. "A direct hit from Pakistan," he explained. "Unusual, but still we should not linger."

I agreed. By evening we had reached the town of Kargil in Ladakh, safely beyond the battlefront. Yet from the veranda of my hotel I heard cannon fire until late in the night.

The next day brought us without incident from Kargil to my destination of Leh. But one last surprise was in store.

At nine o'clock that night I was crossing the old polo ground near Leh's main bazaar, on my way back from a celebratory meal at a Tibetan restaurant. A dozen freight trucks stood parked at the edge of the field. One of them, a big orange Tata truck, caught my attention. Across its tailgate was painted a logo I knew: The Flying Sikh.

The Sikh in question sat before his truck with a half-dozen other turbaned drivers. Chatting in Punjabi and laughing, they ate together by the light of a lantern propped on a fender. A trucker's encampment.

They were quick to welcome me into their circle. The Flying Sikh lifted a tarp and showed me his freight: sacks of rice and flour, "from warehouses," he said, "down by Amritsar."

In the morning, he explained, he would drop his cargo with a distributor here in town. "And then," he added, "by noon tomorrow I shall be on the highway back to Srinagar. Also my friends." He nodded at the other drivers.

"Tomorrow?" I felt weak even visualizing a repetition of the odyssey I'd just completed.

"Oh, yes." He added casually, "I have another load I must pick up five days from now."

A moment of insight. What I had done as a once-in-a-lifetime thrill ride, he—and hundreds like him—did every week as his job.

That put my trip into perspective.

THE DAY OF THE LION: FIRST CLUES IN THE INVESTIGATION

I returned to Ladakh, that summer of 1999, to investigate a remarkable Shia ritual known as *Yawm-e Asad*, "the Day of the Lion." I had first heard of this liturgy through an obnoxious encounter that later turned to my advantage.

The encounter in question involved an individual named Seyyed Hasan Zayn al-Abidin (I have granted him a pseudonym), one of the most

trying mullahs I have ever had to deal with. I had first seen him at a Muharram gathering in Leh in 1995, when he preached an interminably lengthy sermon in a harsh rasping voice. "Gives fresh meaning," I recall noting at the time, "to the word long-winded." Granted, one could say this of many preachers. Nevertheless he stood out in my memory as a sermonizer more tiresome than most.

I saw Zayn al-Abidin the following year, during the 1996 Muharram season, in a very different setting. I was visiting a Shia friend who ran a guesthouse near the main bazaar in Leh. I walked into the front room and found myself in a little drama.

My friend stood stiffly behind the counter. He said nothing. Before the counter stood Hasan Zayn al-Abidin, gulping tea from a large cup. A boy with a kettle waited nervously, ready to offer a refill. Between gulps the mullah harangued the proprietor. He spoke in Urdu and was easy enough to understand.

He reminded my friend that he was a seyyed, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Charity to seyyeds earns one religious merit. Moreover, he was a religious scholar, one of the *ulama*. Such people depend for survival on the generosity of believers. And so on.

Still my friend said nothing. But he opened a drawer, counted out five hundred rupees, and surrendered the money.

So much as a thank you? Not on your life. Zayn al-Abidin grunted, pocketed the cash, finished his tea, and turned to go. Then he saw me.

"My American colleague." His face changed: from imperious to friendly. Warmly he shook my hand; but I noticed that he covered his own first with the cuff of his flowing sleeve, to protect himself, I guessed, from impure contact with a non-Muslim.

I greeted the mullah, said the necessary, and tried to turn my attention to my friend. Not so fast. Zayn al-Abidin kept my hand clasped in his and would not let me back away.

Suddenly talkative, he recounted his life story for my benefit. How he grew up in Uttar Pradesh and studied in Lucknow at an institution called Sultan al-Madaris. How he went on to undertake religious studies in Iran, in the seminary town of Qom. How in Qom he met a Ladakhi seminarian from Leh, who had invited him to come to Ladakh for the Muharram season.

"And now I'm welcome here every year," he triumphed, "for the rest of my life, for as long as I want, to preach every year and visit all my friends." At this he turned and smiled sweetly at the proprietor. "The Ladakhis are very generous."

This, I told myself, must be leading to something.

Correct. Still clasping my hand, he began asking whether I might put myself forward as his sponsor and help him get a visa to visit the United States. There were many Urdu-speaking Shias in places like Chicago, he'd been told, and many preaching opportunities for a *maulvi* such as himself. "You must have influence," he urged. After all, I was a university professor.

It was difficult to explain that really I did not have all that much pull at the American consulate in Delhi, or anywhere else, for that matter. For the next few days Zayn al-Abidin followed me about the bazaar whenever he saw me and repeated his visa request. For my part I did my best to avoid him.

And then the shopkeeper, Reza, the cigarette vendor who had befriended me the previous year, invited me to come with him to the nearby village of Phyang to visit family.

This sounded like a wonderful invitation, I told him, although I did not confess all the reasons why: that I was eager to get out of town and have a break from an importunate mullah.

But it was on this visit to Phyang that I first heard of *Yawm-e Asad*, the Day of the Lion. Phyang itself was a good discovery, a quiet agricultural community dominated by an old Buddhist monastery on a hill. Where Leh is convulsed with tourist traffic and an intrusive military presence, Phyang by comparison feels peaceful, remote. And here I was introduced to the village's chief *maulvi*, Sheikh Ghulam Hadi, a stoop-shouldered, gentle man perhaps sixty years in age. With what seemed to be a grand total of three teeth remaining in his head, he gummed his Urdu in a way that taxed my understanding. But he was cheerful and hospitable, and this is what counted.

During that first visit in 1996 we talked mostly of life in Phyang and of preparations for the village's participation in Leh's Zuljenah procession. But Sheikh Ghulam Hadi referred also to the Day of the Lion. This curious title caught my attention and I asked for an explanation. *Dusra Muharram* was his other name for the occasion: "the second Muharram."

The Islamic calendar, the sheikh reminded me, is lunar, and so holy days such as Muharram shift their date every year in relation to the solar calendar. Whenever Muharram occurs in winter, he explained (and in most years Ladakh's Muharram falls during the *sardiyan*, the "cold days" that extend from October through early June), Ladakhis hold a second, additional, series of rituals to commemorate the death of Husain.

Is this "second Muharram" called "the Day of the Lion," I asked, because of some connection with Ali ibn Abi Talib, Husain's father, who bore the honorific title *Asad Allah* (Lion of God)?

No, replied, the sheikh, that was only a coincidence of names, although a felicitous one. The "second Muharram" is called the Day of the

Lion because it always falls under the *Borj-e Asad*, the constellation of Leo. That is, Ladakh's summertime commemoration of Karbala is determined by the zodiacal calendar and always occurs sometime during the period from July 21 to August 21.

Our talk was carried away into other topics, and it was another three years before I was able to witness the Day of the Lion for myself. But in the interim I contacted other researchers in Shia Islam. None of them had ever heard of such a festival. But Nicky Grist, a British scholar with particular expertise in the Shia communities of Ladakh's Kargil district, came upon a relevant reference in Amar Singh Chohan's *Historical Study of Society and Culture in Dardistan and Ladakh*. Nicky was kind enough to forward me the reference.

Discussing nineteenth-century Muslim religious practices in the region comprising the upper Indus valley, Baltistan, and what is today known as Pakistan's Northern Areas, Chohan makes the following observation: "The Shiahs in these countries lamented the martyrdom of the sons of Ali twice a year; once at the usual time according to the Mohammedan calendar, and again in the month of August, the season at which they said martyrdom actually occurred."[1]

That was all. But it was enough to convince me that a summertime trip to Ladakh would be in order, under the zodiacal sign of the Lion.

THE 1999 KARGIL CRISIS AND MUSLIM-BUDDHIST TENSIONS IN LADAKH

July 1999. It had been two years since my last visit to Ladakh. Many things were different, some of them caused by the Kargil Crisis and the Pakistan-supported incursion of militants across the Line of Control. Leh district's population had temporarily swollen with refugees (mostly Muslim) from the war zone. They took what work they could find, as construction laborers, drivers, menials. My first day in Leh township, I stopped by my friend Reza's cigarette kiosk in the main bazaar for a chat but found the shop shuttered. I met up with him at his new job (he was working as a building-site foreman at the Imamia Model School, a new elementary school located just behind the bazaar). He told me that with Pakistan's bombardment of the Srinagar-Leh highway, truck deliveries had slowed, supplies were short, and it would be another two weeks before he could expect to reopen his shop.

I asked after friends I had last seen in 1997 and learned that two of them were away at the Line of Control, hard by the border with Pakistan. Like a number of other Ladakhis, they were serving as coolies with the Indian

army. "They bring ammunition up into the hills to our soldiers," said Reza, "and they bring down dead bodies."

Reza had a curious story to tell about this. Some of the corpses brought down by the porters, he said, were of Indian soldiers, but others were of the enemy, abandoned by the Pakistanis when they withdrew from one mountain height to another. "Among the enemy bodies," continued my friend, "they found dead Afghans, and Sudanese from Africa. *Mujahideen.*" Holy warriors, in other words: fighters from various parts of the Islamic world, drawn to the Kashmir conflict as an opportunity to attack India. The Ladakhis were not pleased to find themselves the object of a *jihad*. The Ladakhi population hardest hit by Pakistan's bombing in the Crisis was Muslim; but this had not inhibited Pakistan. This conversation furthered my impression that the Kargil Crisis had increased Ladakhi Muslims' sense of themselves as Indian citizens.

Together Reza and I made our way through the bazaar. The place was more crowded than I recalled from previous years, and not just because of the Kargili refugees. July is prime tourist time, and war crisis notwithstanding, there were foreigners in plenty, flashy and spandexed in black and pink high-tech hikers' gear. Their muscled holiday exuberance contrasted with the clusters I encountered of Bihari road workers, underfed, gaunt-faced men. Summer is the optimum season for highway repair, and these migrants come north to the high altitude regions tempted by the prospect of better money than they could make back in Bihar. "At home they get only thirty rupees per day," said Reza. "Here, they earn 125. But they have no proper shelter, and those that stay on past the summer risk freezing to death at night. Some die of exposure every year."

In the bazaar I looked for the *matam-serai* I knew so well from previous seasons, and I experienced a jolt of dislocation. It was gone. "We had to tear it down," said Reza. The building had been old and was getting to be a hazard. *Girne-wala tha*, is the way he phrased it: it had been about to fall down. Still, I was sorry. It had been a place of intense memories. Plans were afoot for a new shrine, to be built on the same site; but delays of various kinds had prevented any work as yet.

"So where did you celebrate Muharram this year?" I asked.

"We used the Balti Masjid [the Shia mosque located behind the main bazaar's Sunni Jami Masjid] for *majalis*. The Zuljenah procession began at the Balti Masjid and went from there to the courtyard of our new Imamia Model School."

Among the changes I noticed, one at least was definitely for the better. In a previous chapter I mentioned the cacophonous loudspeaker war I had

heard in 1996 and 1997, when mosques and gompas in Leh township tried to out-blare each other with overlapping chants and drones.[2] But this year the Muslim *adhan* was relatively muted and soft-volumed; and the Buddhist monasteries did not interrupt the Islamic call to prayer at all.

Muslims I asked credited the Dalai Lama with ending the noise feud. On visits to Ladakh in 1998, and in late June and early July of 1999, he is said to have criticized local Buddhists for attempting to drown out Muslim prayer broadcasts. It's all right for Muslims to engage in *adhan* (the call to worship), the Dalai Lama reportedly said; it's part of their tradition, and they've been doing it for a long time. But there's no need for us to broadcast our prayers except on big feast days. Avoid competition, the Dalai Lama told his Buddhists; and they seem to have listened. The Muslims who reported this to me sounded impressed. I know I was.

But this olive-branch gesture must be set against statements issued during the worst of the 1999 Kargil Crisis by the "Youth Wing" of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA). They protested the arrival of Kargili refugees in Leh district, warning that Muslim terrorists and disguised militants among the horde of newcomers could easily infiltrate Ladakh and then carry out acts of violence. The Indian newspaper *The Tribune* announced, "The migration of over 20,000 persons from the Dras-Kargil sections, most of them shifting to Leh, has started a fresh row between the Buddhist-dominated Leh and Muslim-dominated Kargil districts in the recent weeks." It went on to report that the LBA's Youth Wing had issued a letter addressed to Leh district's deputy commissioner protesting the refugee influx and hinting at potential backlash: "You are . . . requested to initiate immediate steps to send the fake refugees back to their district before the tranquil atmosphere of Leh is vitiated. The administration will be responsible if the peaceful conditions of Leh are unduly disturbed."[3] Another newspaper, *The Kashmir Times*, quoted LBA Youth Wing president Lobzang Wyantak as asserting that "our people will be the last to play host and extend hospitality to these fifth columnists."[4]

This unpleasantness generated a response from the Kargil-based Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust (an organization referred to in an earlier chapter and discussed in more detail below). According to *The Tribune*'s newspaper report, Asghar Karbalai, the Khomeini Trust's general secretary, issued a reply to the effect that the LBA's statement had "exposed the inhuman approach of the people of Leh, who refuse to give shelter to those in distress." Karbalai emphasized the refugees' peaceful disposition. Kargili refugees interviewed by reporters noted the unfairness of the LBA's allegations: despite violence from Pakistan and economic neglect by the Indian govern-

ment, Kargil district had remained loyal to India; Kargilis deserved recognition rather than abuse.[5]

Shias in Leh township with whom I discussed the issue said that the LBA Youth Wing's controversial statement had been motivated by Buddhist fears of a growing Muslim population. "Their numbers are stagnant; ours are climbing," was the way one Muslim informant phrased it. "Kashmir and Kargil are already largely Muslim. The LBA wants to hold the line in Leh district." For this reason, I was told, the Youth Wing had issued its statement: it feared that Kargili Muslim refugees would settle in Leh, refuse to go home, and "overwhelm" the local Buddhist population. But the LBA outcry ended, I was told in August 1999, once Leh's Buddhists saw the refugees begin to return to Kargil as the fighting around the Line of Control subsided.

Communal tensions in 1999 also led to the reactivation of a once moribund organization, the Ladakh Muslim Association (LMA). Founded as an umbrella group to represent the interests of Sunnis and Shias of the region, the LMA disintegrated in 1994, after the end of the Social Boycott that the LBA had directed against local Muslims. Martijn van Beek describes the Ladakh Muslim Association as follows: "The LMA is—to put it in 1990s pop idiom—a virtual organisation. It does not have any formal existence (no statutes, not registered, no membership, etc.) but is an 'ad hoc' body that is called into existence (virtually) at times of crisis where a unified Muslim voice is sought to be presented."[6]

Such a situation arose in 1999, when the Ladakh Buddhist Association claimed that local Buddhist girls were being abducted for marriage by Muslims and forcibly converted to Islam. Under the banner of the "Co-ordination Committee of [the] Ladakh Muslim Association," Sunni and Shia leaders jointly published a statement refuting the Buddhists' allegations as "baseless, concocted, unfounded, and mischievous."[7]

"THE HEART OF THE LION": SHIA RATIONALIZATIONS FOR SUMMERTIME LAMENTATION RITUALS IN LADAKH

When I returned to Ladakh in the summer of 1999 I made a point of visiting the village of Phyang at the earliest opportunity. This was partly in order to see Sheikh Ghulam Hadi, from whom I had first learned of the Day of the Lion. But my visit was also motivated by good memories of the place as a pleasant restful site largely free (once one leaves the main road that funnels tourists to Phyang's Buddhist monastery) of cars and freight trucks.

Nor was I disappointed by the return visit. First the sheikh and I admired the water-driven grain mill that he had built since my trip here. Then he walked me about the village, past green fields under cultivation, across wooden planks bridging rushing mountain streams, their currents fed by the line of ice peaks whose summits lined the horizon. The only traffic we had to face were clusters of donkeys and children. When I exclaimed over the mildness of the landscape, the sheikh warned me to reserve judgment until I experienced winter here, when the temperature drops to minus fifty degrees centigrade. Still, this was the closest to a Shangri-La pastoral that I had ever encountered in Ladakh.

The goal of our walk was a new *matam-serai* presently under construction, the village's second. Carpenters gathered admiringly to listen as the sheikh led me inside the shrine and read aloud the Arabic calligraphic lettering painted on the walls and columns:

> Musa ibn Imran [the Prophet Moses of the Qur'an] asked, "O my God, with what qualities have you made Muhammad's community excel, in preference to all other communities?" God replied, "With ten qualities." Moses asked, "And what are these ten qualities that they practice, that I may order the children of Israel to practice them, too?" God, may He be exalted, replied: "Prayer, almsgiving, and fasting; the hajj, jihad, and Friday-gathering; community, Qur'an, and knowledge; and the day of Ashura."
>
> Moses asked, "O Lord, and what is Ashura?"
>
> He replied: "Weeping, or even giving the appearance of weeping, for the grandson of Muhammad; and dirge-chanting; and mourning over the tragedy that will befall the descendants of God's Chosen One. When that time comes, o Moses, anyone from among my servants who weeps, or even makes a show of weeping, or mourns for the descendants of the Chosen One: such a person will have Paradise granted to him for all eternity."

A traditional Shia sentiment, this: it defines Muslim identity primarily in terms of mourning for Husain, the grandson of "God's Chosen One" (that is, the Prophet Muhammad); and it holds out the promise of eternal reward for such mourners.

Over lunch at Ghulam Hadi's house, I asked him whether he knew the source from which this passage had been taken. Delighted with the question, he left the guest room to hunt among his library shelves, and returned smiling with a book opened to the passage in question. "From here," he said. He held

in his hands a copy of Sheikh Mahdi al-Ha'iri's *Ma'ali al-sibtayn* ("The Noble Traits of the Two Grandsons").[8]

Of even greater interest to me was the fact that my host had bought the book in Iraq, over thirty-five years ago, while studying in a religious school in Najaf. He was proud of the fact that he had studied Islamic law with the celebrated Ayatollah al-Khui. Ten long years he had lived in Iraq, he told me. "A very hot place," he reminisced. "Hot and uncomfortable." I looked out the guest room window, at the apricot trees in blossom, and I imagined how welcoming this village must have seemed upon his return home.

While researching the Day of the Lion I met another Ladakhi Shia who had studied in Najaf, and who in fact had been a classmate of Ghulam Hadi in Iraq: Sheikh Muhammad Ali Zubdavi, chief *maulvi* of the nearby village of Thikse (he is also the best speaker of classical Arabic I encountered in Leh district). Like Phyang, Thikse is a site in Leh district whose population is primarily Buddhist; it is known for its large monastery perched on a hill. Also like Phyang, Thikse has a small Muslim community and a Shia *matam-serai*. Muhammad Ali's father was a Balti from Skardu (across the border in Pakistan's Northern Areas), who came to Thikse and settled there at the invitation of the local Shias. Up until that time, Sheikh Muhammad explained, Thikse's Shias lacked any religious scholar to give them guidance. He added that his father had been the first person from Ladakh to study in Iraq and Iran.

A third scholarly informant in my Day of the Lion research was Seyyed Naqi Shah, the principal of the Imamiyah Mission School in the village of Chushot. Chushot is predominantly Muslim and Shia rather than Buddhist. Local tradition asserts that its Shias are descended from the Baltis who accompanied Gyal Katun, princess of Skardu, when she came to Ladakh four centuries ago to marry Jamyang Namgyal.[9] Chushot is famous, local informants told me, for the prominence and fervor of its Shia community.

Naqi Shah himself comes from a distinguished lineage. His ancestor, Seyyed Husain Qommi, was an Iranian who joined a preaching expedition led by Seyyed Ali Hamadhani, the fourteenth-century Sufi renowned for his work in the conversion of Kashmir.[10] Seyyed Qommi subsequently settled in Kashmir. Naqi Shah still has relatives in Srinagar, but he himself is an inhabitant of Ladakh because of the activities of his maternal grandfather, Seyyed Abdul Rasul. Both a scholar and a merchant, Abdul Rasul traveled on foot with the great caravans that once went from Kashmir to Yarkand in Chinese Xinjiang, where he combined business with preaching. Ladakh was once vital to this Central Asian trade route, and Abdul Rasul stopped at Chushot frequently in his travels. At the invitation of local Shias, he settled in this village and became the resident *maulvi*. Family

histories such as this suggest the diverse backgrounds comprising today's Ladakhi Shia population.

On the basis of information supplied by these religious scholars in Chushot, Thikse, and Phyang, together with anecdotes and reminiscences offered by friends in Leh township, I was able to put together the following sketch of the history and rituals surrounding *Yawm-e Asad,* the Day of the Lion (or "Asad" as it was sometimes called for short in Urdu chats on the topic). I first discuss Asad as it was presented to me in conversation; then I discuss the ritual as I experienced it in August 1999.

The scholars I met in the villages all knew that the Day of the Lion is largely confined (with one notable exception, discussed below) to Ladakh. A "second Muharram," they said, is never celebrated in other parts of the Shia world such as Iran, southern Iraq, or Lebanon. My informants were quick to justify this unusual Ladakhi practice.

The first thing I needed to know, they told me, was that the Imam Husain had died in the excruciating heat of mid-summer, under the zodiacal sign of Leo. *Kana fi qalb al-asad,* as Sheikh Muhammad Ali expressed it to me in Arabic: "It was in the heart of Asad," when the heat was at its fiercest. Thus in the sixty-first year of the hijrah, when Husain died, the lunar month of Muharram coincided with the solar month of Leo. Thus the most appropriate commemorations of Husain's death occur in those seasons when the weather is at its hottest.

Second (my informants said), I must bear in mind that Ladakh's weather is very cold for most of the year. This means that Muharram in Ladakh usually occurs during the *sardiyan;* and it is impossible in winter to convey fully to congregations the Karbala martyrs' sufferings under the desert sun or do justice to Husain's torments of thirst. Additionally, Ladakhi winters discourage many people from turning out to attend Muharram *majalis* and the public Zuljenah processions that take place outdoors on the street. Therefore, in those years when Muharram occurs in cold weather, a "second Muharram" is held in the summer, sometime during the zodiacal month of Leo. The date of the summertime *majlis* and procession is called *Yawm-e Asad,* the Day of the Lion.

Asad is a village observance rather than an urban one. It is never celebrated in Leh township. During Muharram, villagers journey to the city of Leh for the big Zuljenah procession on Ashura; but in August the flow is in the other direction, as the residents of Leh come to the outlying villages for *Yawm-e Asad.* A kind of symmetry is established: the city is responsible for the universal and better-known observance of Muharram linked to the canonical Islamic calendar; the provincial outposts in the countryside observe the older, pre-Islamic, zodiacal calendar.

This also allows for a show of strength. During Muharram, Shias gather in Leh from throughout Ladakh and demonstrate their numbers; in the summer they go out to the villages and impress the Buddhists (this is how one informant put it to me) with how many Shias there are in the district.

Not one but four Asad celebrations are held each year in the villages of Leh district, in sequence on successive Sundays throughout the month of Leo. Traditionally Chushot holds the first two Asad observances. It goes first, I was told, because of its prestige and antiquity as a site of Ladakhi Shia culture. Chushot is a large village comprising two parts, Yoghma (lower) and Goma (upper), each with its own *matam-serai*. Of the two, Chushot Yoghma is situated nearer Leh township, not far from the Choglamsar Bridge that spans the Indus River. Each year Chushot Yoghma holds the first Asad observance, followed on subsequent weekends by Chushot Goma, Phyang, and Thikse.

Regardless of venue, the order of liturgical events in this summertime liturgy is largely the same. A *majlis* or lamentation gathering takes place on Saturday night, called *Yawm-e Asad ka shab* or *Shab-e Asad* (Lion's Eve). On Sunday morning there begins another, longer, *majlis*, which includes a number of sermons and the performance of *nauhas*, chanted to the accompaniment of *matam*. *Yawm-e Asad* then concludes in the late afternoon or early evening with a Horse of Karbala procession. "Just like Muharram," the village *maulvis* assured me. In fact I was to witness an important difference; but this I describe below.

"Why Sunday?" I asked. For pragmatic reasons, I learned: Asad is held then because more people are likely to be free from work on Sundays than any other day of the week. Naqi Shah emphasized that it is important to schedule Asad to permit the greatest number of congregants to assemble so as to fulfill one of the most outstanding purposes of Asad: *tabligh* (propagation of the faith, or religious education). "*Yawm-e Asad* is an opportunity," he said, "to gather many individuals while the weather is good and it's easy to travel. Then everyone, fathers, mothers, and children, can learn about Husain's death and the significance of his sacrifice. It's also easier to bring in guest preachers from outside." He pointed out that this year one such guest preacher would come up from Dehra Dun, in Uttar Pradesh.

But this pragmatic flexibility in scheduling suggests the secondary status of *Yawm-e Asad* in comparison with Muharram. Ashura (often simply called "Muharram") is recognized as a holiday in India. Shias generally have no difficulty in taking the day off from work (and often the several days leading up to Ashura) to attend *majalis* and processions.

Asad is different. In Leh township most non-Shias I asked, whether Buddhist or Sunni, had never heard of it. An exception is Ghulam Rasul

Bailay, a Sunni Ladakhi from Leh, a newspaper journalist with considerable travel experience. He told me of Kargili Shia road workers in Leh who had baffled their Sunni foremen by asking for time off to go to the villages to perform *matam*.

"It was really quite funny," he reported. "The foremen said, 'But Muharram was months ago.' And the workers replied, 'Yes, but this is Asad,' and off they went." Given such potential for misunderstanding, my informants told me, it makes sense that the villages schedule the Day of the Lion for Sundays, when the fewest conflicts with work schedules will occur.

With rare exceptions the only non-Shias in Leh township who knew of Asad were those select Sunni Muslims—a handful of preachers and scholars—who are given written invitations every year by the village organizing committees and are asked to offer a guest sermon. Interfaith gestures are much more characteristic of Ladakh's urban celebration of Muharram. In Leh township members of the Ladakh Buddhist Association are invited to attend the "funeral feast" in honor of Husain on the fourteenth of Muharram; and the Sunni Anjuman-e Mu'in-e Islam turns out in strength to join the Shia Zuljenah procession and shout *Allahu akbar* along the length of Leh's main bazaar. But Sunnis do not march in the villages' Lion processions, I was told. They confine their show of pan-Islamic solidarity to downtown Leh, on Ashura, where they feel they will make the greatest impression. All of this suggests the provincial flavor of the Day of the Lion.

Also worth noting is that most of the Shias from Leh township who attend Asad go only to the observances held in Chushot (especially the liturgy held in Chushot Yoghma). Few of them travel to Phyang or Thikse. When I asked why I was first told that Chushot is easier to reach than the other two villages: it has better bus links with Leh. But later I learned that other factors come into play. Leh's Shias simply feel more comfortable going to Chushot, a settlement with a Shia-majority population. "And besides," one informant claimed, "the *matam-serai* in Chushot Yoghma is the only village shrine in the region big enough to hold many guests."

I received various answers to the question, "For how many years have Ladakhis been celebrating *Yawm-e Asad*?" Sheikh Muhammad Ali of Thikse told me fifty years, but this was a guess. Other men asserted that they had taken part in Asad since childhood, and so had their fathers and grandfathers. This meant, they said, that the Lion observance goes back at least a hundred years.

Such talk generated interesting reminiscences. Ghulam Reza Khangtakpa, a thirty-three-year-old schoolteacher in Phyang, told me that he had

a vivid memory of *Yawm-e Asad* as a three-year-old. "My father took me to see the procession," he recalled, "and I became very scared: all the people, crying, hitting themselves. And Zuljenah seemed so big! And then my father lifted me up to touch the horse and I got even more scared." Ghulam Reza smiled and said he had occasion to remember all this a year ago when he took his daughter to the *Yawm-e Asad* Zuljenah procession in Phyang and she, too, was afraid of the horse.

Present at this interview was Ghulam Reza's brother-in-law, who broke into the conversation to explain the rationale behind the practice of pressing children against Zuljenah: "Through a miracle, this horse becomes not just the village horse but Zuljenah himself. At least that's the way it seems to us. Thereby," he concluded, "the horse acquires special powers. Especially the power to ward off diseases and satanic influences. That's why we touch children to him."

As for the antiquity of *Yawm-e Asad*: the schoolteacher thought it dated back to the days of the princess Gyal Katun, "hundreds of years ago."

"Does that mean," I pursued the point, "that Asad was brought to Ladakh from Baltistan?"

Everyone I asked said that this might well be so, but they couldn't be certain, partly because no one I interviewed in Leh district was sure whether the Day of the Lion is currently observed in Pakistani Baltistan, the region from which Gyal Katun first came.[11]

One other datum concerning the geographic distribution of Asad observances: Seyyed Naqi Shah of Chushot informed me that the Day of the Lion is also held in parts of Kashmir, especially in Zadibal, a Shia neighborhood in Srinagar. As in Ladakh, Srinagar's Asad observances are said to include a *majlis* and a Zuljenah procession. I expressed surprise at the latter, knowing that Muharram processions have been banned in Srinagar for years, due to pro-independence violence by militants.[12] "Yes," acknowledged Naqi Shah, "the Muharram Zuljenah *jalus* has been banned, because that always used to involve lakhs of people [hundreds of thousands]. But the Asad procession is smaller-scale and confined to a given locality."

Confirmation of Naqi Shah's report came in a newspaper article in the August 7, 1999 issue of the Jammu-based *Daily Excelsior*: "Srinagar, Aug. 6: An impressive Majlis-i-Assad (religious congregation) to commemorate the martyrdom of Hazrat Hussain and his colleagues at Karbala was observed in nook and corner [sic] of the valley today. The biggest congregation was held at historic Imam Bara of Zadibal Srinagar where thousands of devotees from all over the Valley participated and paid rich tributes to the martyrs of Karbala by performing *nawha* and *marsiya* (mourning)."[13]

BLOOD RITUALS AND BLOODY POLITICS IN KARGIL TOWNSHIP

Earlier I mentioned the flexible quality of scheduling with regard to the Day of the Lion. An example of this occurred in the summer of 1999. Initially I was told that the season's first Asad observance would be held on Sunday, August 1. But then Chushot Yoghma's planning committee postponed the event until the following weekend, August 8. The reason: a number of village Shias were still away in the Kargil district, serving the army as porters in the war zone. The postponement allowed some of them to return home in time for Asad.

I pointed out to my friend Reza that this postponement meant that the fourth Asad of the season wouldn't be until August 29, well after the end of the zodiacal month. He shrugged and said, "True. But the weather will still be warm, and that's an important factor."

I interviewed a number of Kargili Shias resident in Leh and learned that the Day of the Lion is also observed in Kargil district, but with the same town-country distinction found in Leh. That is, Muharram is observed in Kargil township, while Asad is celebrated in the villages.

My inquiries among Kargili Shias led me to learn about factional politics in Kargil township. There the two major Shia organizations are the "Islamiya School" and the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust (often referred to by its acronym, IKMT). In her dissertation on Muslim politics in Kargil district's Suru Valley, Nicky Grist makes the following reference to these two groups: "The former [that is, the Islamiya School] has been in existence since the 1950s as a school of religious instruction for younger men, most of whom subsequently study at one of the Shi'ite centres in the Middle East. Nowadays it has an imposing building in Kargil's main bazaar. The latter was started after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini as a social welfare organisation, and runs a chain of schools in and around Kargil town."[14]

I had visited IKMT headquarters in Kargil in 1997 and was eager to learn more about the attitudes characterizing these two factions. The groups are well known in Leh district. During the summer of 1999 I gathered a number of anecdotes concerning them from local Shias and Sunnis, as well as Kargili Shias residing in Leh.

To illustrate how serious the rivalry between IKMT and the Islamiya School is, several informants mentioned an incident that occurred sometime in 1997 or 1998 (my sources could not agree on the date, but enough people mentioned it to me that I took the story seriously). It seems that Iran's

ambassador to India wanted to go to Kargil and address the town's Shia community (this did not surprise me, given the numerous accounts I have heard of the Iranian government furnishing financial aid for Kargili Shias to study at Qom). But the ambassador had to abort his trip and leave Kargil in a hurry, because when he arrived street-fighting broke out between adherents of IKMT and the Islamiya School. Each faction, it seems, had insisted that the ambassador come to its headquarters first to speak.

The Islamiya School is more attuned to traditional Shiism as practiced in Kargil, while IKMT prides itself on its orientation to the Iranian Islamic Republic. My informants characterized the Islamiya School as conservative, IKMT as relatively liberal (by "liberal" my informants meant: open to changes dictated by Iran's religious authorities).

IKMT favors education for girls, I was told, and it also advocates *taqrib*: worldwide Sunni-Shia rapprochement. In this it reflects the legacy of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who sought to downplay Sunni-Shia differences as a way of building alliances with radical Sunni movements in the Middle East.[15] Ghulam Rasul Bailay, the Sunni Ladakhi journalist mentioned above, told me of seeing posters on the streets of Kargil township that discussed Sunni-Shia differences with regard to the bodily gestures involved in *namaz* (ritual prayer). These posters, he said, emphasized that the differences involved are unimportant, given the larger issues facing global Islam.

Such ecumenism has met a stumbling block, however, in divergent Kargili interpretations of the Ayatollah Khamenei's 1994 fatwa concerning bloody *matam*. The decree expressly forbade the public performance of *qameh-zadan*.[16] This Persian term literally means "dagger-striking." It is also understood by many Indian Shias to refer to a specific form of *matam* from among many: cutting one's forehead with a knife (an action also referred to as *shamshir-zani*). The Islamiya School interprets *qameh-zadan* in this more restricted sense and therefore maintains that Khamenei's fatwa forbids only the specific action of knife cuts. Consequently, the Islamiya School says, the action of *zanjiri-matam* (striking oneself with a flail comprising several blades attached to chains) is not forbidden. And in fact I would say, based on my own observations of Ashura and *Yawm-e Asad*, that *zanjiri-matam* is quite popular among Ladakhi Shias. Therefore, despite the 1994 decree, the Islamiya School continues to sponsor lamentation processions in which marchers perform flagellation with *zanjirs* and shed their blood.

IKMT, I was told by Shias in Leh, interprets Khamenei's fatwa more broadly. This organization understands *qameh-zadan* to refer to any action whatsoever of cutting oneself. Therefore the popular practice of *zanjiri-matam* is to be considered *haram* (forbidden). For this reason IKMT sponsors

processions in which participants do nothing more severe than *hath ka matam* (bare-handed chest-beating).

In my own estimate IKMT is looking to the deeper meaning informing Khamenei's pronouncement. He makes it clear (as I discuss in a previous chapter) that his worry is the damage done to Shia Islam's image abroad if non-Shias see marchers spilling their blood and harming themselves. Thus IKMT's Muharram processions conform to the spirit of *taqrib*: offering an image of Shiism calculated not to offend Sunni Muslims.

Ritual differences between IKMT and the Islamiya School reached a flash point in 1997, I was told, when each faction staged its own separate Muharram procession in the town of Kargil. IKMT marchers restricted themselves to chest-beating; Islamiya School loyalists scourged themselves bloody with *zanjirs*. Thereby each group proclaimed its adherence to a particular understanding of Shia Islam. When the two processions converged at the town's *qatl-gah* (literally the "killing site," an open space where mourners gather on Ashura), fighting broke out between the two groups. Since then, I was told, the factions have (for the most part) avoided violent confrontations. But they continue to hold separate Muharram marches, in which each group manifests its own understanding of Khamenei's restrictions on *matam*: Islamiya School marchers use *zanjirs*, IKMT processionists limit themselves to bare-handed chest-strikes.[17]

I mentioned above Indian newspaper articles describing IKMT general secretary Asghar Karbalai's response to LBA warnings, in which he defended Kargili refugees from Buddhist accusations of terrorism and militancy. Karbalai's statement seems to conform to IKMT's larger agenda as described to me by various Ladakhi Shia and Sunni informants. Their impression is that IKMT's recent public statements emphasize that Kargili Shias are patriots and good Indian citizens. Moreover, my informants said, IKMT has been claiming that Pakistan targets Kargil for bombing and other forms of violence because most Kargilis are Shia, and Pakistan is vehemently biased against Shias. Given IKMT's tendency to follow Iranian guidance, it seems that IKMT's recent statements reflect a cooling in Iran's relations with Pakistan, in the wake of Pakistani support for the Afghan Taliban and the Taliban's persecution of the Hazara Shia minority in Afghanistan.[18]

My informants claimed that IKMT's statements reflect another tendency presently at work in Kargil. In the past, they said, Kargili Muslims used to be more supportive of Kashmir and sympathized with Kashmiri bids for autonomy from India. This resulted from a feeling of solidarity with fellow Muslims. But the effect of Pakistan's bombardment of Kargil has been to make Kargilis increasingly identify their interests with India.

The factionalism described above has not improved the reputation of Kargili religious authorities among lay Shias in Ladakh. I was surprised at the number of stories I was told (always in private, and always well away from any shrine) in the summer of 1999 concerning the sins of local mullahs. At a restaurant in Leh called the Tibetan Kitchen, I met with several young Kargilis active in the tourist trade. They called themselves "independent Shias." They revered Husain, attended *majalis* annually in honor of his sacrifice, and despised the religious hierarchy in Ladakh.

They catalogued for my benefit the failings of mullahs back home in Kargil. Their backwardness: "Most of these *maulvis* tell families to give their children only a traditional religious training; otherwise, they say, the children will lose their faith. That's why IKMT has made inroads among the youth, with its call for modern education suited for the coming generation." Their pridefulness: "If a *maulvi* visits a home and the host brings him tea and forgets to give him a saucer with the teacup, the *maulvi* gets angry and calls him a *kafir*." And especially their greed: "Whenever they visit a village, they never leave without leading out a string of goats" (this is a vivid way of referring to ecclesiastical skill in cadging gifts). The goat reference triggered a burst of laughter at our table and reminded me of the long tradition of irreverence directed at mullahs in Iran.[19]

THE DAY OF THE LION IN CHUSHOT VILLAGE, LADAKH

Here I will describe the rituals surrounding *Yawm-e Asad* as I experienced it in Chushot Yoghma on Sunday, August 8, 1999. For weeks I had been making a pest of myself, checking with informants on a daily basis to see whether the "Seerat Committee" (as the Asad organizers were called) had set a date yet for the Day of the Lion.

Individuals gave me conflicting reports. In late July storms and mudslides washed out the highway near Khaltse; it may be, some said, that the first Asad won't begin until the road is cleared, to facilitate transportation for anyone from western Ladakh who wants to attend. Thikse's *maulvi* told me that the opening Asad ritual would be held August first for sure. Folks in Chushot told me no, that they would wait one more week: we are waiting for the return of family members, they said, serving as ammunition porters at the Pakistan front. To me, at least, an air of improvisation and uncertainty seemed to characterize many proceedings that summer of the Kargil Crisis.

Resolution did not come until Friday, August 6, a mere two days before the first liturgy of the season. I visited my friend Reza at his new construction job at Leh's Imamia Model School. Smiling broadly (he knew I would be pleased), he pulled from his coat pocket a grainy half sheet of paper printed in smudged Urdu. "An invitation," he announced, "for you. The committee is distributing these today to selected authorities and distinguished personalities." I thanked him for the compliment and read my invitation:

> 786/110 [in Arabic numerology 786 stands for the phrase "in the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful"; 110, for the name Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Shia Imam]:
>
> The Seerat Committee of the Husaini Assembly of the shrine in Chushot Yoghma, Leh, in accordance with custom, has fixed the dates for the eve of the Day of the Lion (*Yawm-e Asad ka shab*) and for the day of Ashura (*wa-roz-e 'Ashura*): the seventh through the eighth of August, 1999, Saturday and Sunday, sequentially, to be held at the Chushot Yoghma Imambara.
>
> Therefore, it is requested that all believers please come together for these abovementioned gatherings so as to obtain religious merit both in this world and in the world to come.

On Sunday morning Reza and I traveled on a very crowded bus from Leh to Chushot Yoghma. By the time we reached there it was eleven o'clock and the courtyard was filled with other vehicles: vans unloading *tabarruk* (refreshments to be distributed at the *majlis*), buses from which passengers competed to be the first to push their way free, big freight trucks crowded with boys and girls who stood in the back and sang enthusiastically as each truck pulled in.

They had reason to sing, I thought. A beautiful setting: rural, beside the Indus River, with mountains beyond the far shore under a sunny cloudless sky. Even though some chanter inside was intoning a mournful *marsiyeh* dirge to signal the start of the *majlis*, few people as yet had entered the shrine. Most stood outside and chatted, while children ate candy and chased each other through the crowd. The only discordant note in this otherwise festive mood was a banner over the *matam-serai*'s entrance displaying a pugnacious quotation from the Ayatollah Khomeini: "The hands of the Americans and other superpowers are plunged to the hilt in the blood of our youth. We will combat them to the last drop of our blood because we are warriors!"

The hands of this American were busy snapping pictures of all the people who came by asking for photos of themselves with their friends.

EXCURSUS. PILGRIMS' ART: LADAKHI VOTIVE WALL-HANGINGS

I took Reza's suggestion that we tour the interior of the shrine before it filled with congregants. The most notable decorations I saw inside the *matam-serai* were a pair of what he called *dast-kari tasvirein* (hand-work pictures): wall-hangings stitched in colored appliqué cloth depicting scenes from the battle of Karbala. I had seen similar hangings in Leh township and Phyang during my previous visits to Ladakh.

These *tasvirein*, Reza told me, were from Iran. Ladakhi Shia pilgrims purchase them when they visit Iranian shrine sites such as the Eighth Imam's tomb at Meshhed and then donate them as ex-voto offerings to their local *matam-serai* when they return home to Ladakh. In Iran, I was told, these hangings are offered for sale ready-made in the bazaars beside the Imams' tombs. Ordinarily space is left blank in the lower border of the picture. For a price buyers can have their names sewn into the fabric.

The two wall-hangings I saw that day in Chushot were fine examples of the genre. Like most such hangings that I have seen in Ladakh, they both showed the most typical Muharram iconography: the severed arm of Abbas; palm trees (to suggest the Karbala desert); and Zuljenah (depicted as a white horse bleeding from arrow wounds, its right foreleg raised; it wears a green surcoat). Beneath the horse, in both pictures, lies a scimitar.

But each hanging differed in certain details. One offered orange and red lettering on a black cloth field. Beside the horse was sewn the Persian phrase *Zuhr-e 'Ashura dar Karbala* ("the afternoon of Ashura at Karbala," an evocation of the moment when Zuljenah galloped riderless from the battle-field, its presence announcing Husain's death). Surrounded by a circle of roses were the words, "Hail, Abu'l Fadl al-Abbas."

The above wording was conventional. Of more interest was the title stitched in Persian lettering within a cartouche at the bottom of the picture: "The donor and pilgrim Akhun Mirza Mehdi, of Chushot." And beneath this was sewn a date, 13-7-97.

This personalized the artwork. The donor was able to announce both his piety in having made the pilgrimage to Iran and his generosity in having given the hanging to his hometown *matam-serai*. Since Akhun Mirza calls himself *hajji* (pilgrim) in the dedication, I assumed that he had also journeyed

to Mecca (the Arabic term *hajj* refers specifically to the pilgrimage to Mecca that comprises one of Islam's Five Pillars). But Reza said that I should not automatically make this assumption. In Ladakh, he explained, Shias often give themselves the title *hajji* after coming back from pilgrimages to shrines in Iran or Iraq.[20]

The second hanging also featured the bleeding Zuljenah, Abbas's severed arm, and a scimitar. But it included additional details: a chain mail headdress; minarets and the dome of a shrine; a pierced flask (recalling Abbas's attempt to bring water to Husain's children); and palm trees above a ribbon of water (to symbolize the river Euphrates). The background is black, the lettering done in yellow and neon-pink. Like the first hanging, this one included the conventional invocation, "Hail, Abu'l Fadl [al-Abbas]."

The second hanging, like the first, offers a personalized inscription in the lower border, but it is painted rather than stitched and in English rather than Persian. It reads: "Sponsar [*sic*]: Haji Azima Bano (Shagaran) C'chut Yogma." This paint-work makes the lettering seem a bit hurried and improvised, especially when compared with the careful stitching devoted to the very fine embroidered horse.

We asked members of the congregation about this hanging and were told that the donor is the president of the Women's Welfare Society of Chushot Yoghma. Azima Bano is from a locality in Chushot called Shagaran. She had just returned from her pilgrimage to Iran only two or three months ago, a bystander said; so this particular hanging was fresh, dating from 1999.

"Why is her name painted rather than stitched?" I asked. This led to speculation among the individuals looking on: she might not have had enough time to have the personalized work done while in Iran, so she was content simply to have her name painted in when she returned home. Or at least such was the consensus of my helpful bystanders.

THE HORSE OF KARBALA AND ITS ROLE IN THE SUMMERTIME RITUAL

My study of the wall-hangings was interrupted by a request. A member of the Seerat Committee approached and asked if I would be willing to be included as a guest speaker among the roster of preachers for the day's *majlis*. This was an honor, and I agreed readily. But it also kept me busy for the next hour scribbling notes and composing my thoughts for a talk in Urdu on my chosen theme: parallels between *qurban-e Hazrat Imam-e Husain* (Imam Husain's sacrifice) and that of Jesus Christ, with emphasis on the need for Muslims

and Christians to learn from each other's faith. I should have anticipated this request, because I had given Urdu speeches by invitation at Leh township's *matam-serai* during my last two visits.

Fortunately I was not the first at bat: the organizers fitted me in as ninth or tenth out of a field of a dozen speakers. After the initial *marsiyeh* dirge, a member of the Chushot Yoghma Seerat Committee stepped to the microphone placed beside the pulpit and made opening comments in Urdu. Throughout the day he acted as master of ceremonies, introducing each preacher and commenting in Urdu on each talk. I was impressed by the commentator's range of quotations: Arabic verses from the Qur'an, snippets of Persian poetry, the essays of the Iranian thinker Ali Shari'ati.

Two languages were in use that day, Ladakhi and Urdu. Some speakers (the guest preacher from Uttar Pradesh and I) were limited to Urdu by ignorance of the local language. But for those preachers knowledgeable in both Ladakhi and Urdu, their choice of language seemed dictated by the tone they wished to convey. Some preachers, like the commentator, spoke in Urdu, discoursing on the theology of Karbala in a formal and relatively restrained manner. But those who spoke in Ladakhi labored hard to work the crowd into a state of emotional involvement.

This brings me to the subject of the overall emotional tone of the Day of the Lion. I was struck by the casual air of the proceedings for the first part of the day, from eleven o'clock to about 3:30. There was a constant flux of congregants in and out of the open doors of the shrine. Beside me men chatted carelessly even as preachers each took their turn at the pulpit. A ground-floor gallery protected by a wooden latticework screen runs along the perimeter of the main assembly hall. Behind the screen I could hear women calling to each other and children running back and forth. A certain degree of inattentiveness is noticeable, of course, at *majalis* anywhere in the world. I attributed the greater degree of inattention on *Yawm-e Asad* to the simple fact that over a dozen preachers were listed on the schedule. The congregation was saving its strength during what it knew would be a long day of speeches.

At about 1:30 a break for *namaz* was announced. A few men stayed indoors for canonical prayer; but most joined the stream of participants exiting the shrine into the hot afternoon sun. People gathered outside around the *tabarruk* refreshment stands. Reza and I followed those who walked along the riverbank looking for a shade tree. Families sat down to eat and called to each other. Boys threw stones in the water. Others ran about in the fields nearby.

"This doesn't feel much like Muharram," I ventured.

"Exactly," came Reza's reply. "The Day of the Lion is always like a picnic." He smiled. "The weather is always nice and warm; the river is here, and some of us have good memories of swimming here as children when our families would come to Chushot for Asad. On a day like this, no one wants to stay in a dark room all day listening to sermons."

His smile broadened. "The preachers tell us on Yawm-e Asad: Hazrat Husain died in the desert sun when the temperature was fifty degrees Celsius. You people should try to imagine his sufferings, they say. And instead we go outside looking for shade and relax."

This lingers in my memory as one of the striking differences between Ladakh's Muharram and the Day of the Lion: the latter's lounging picnic atmosphere. Together with the majority of the congregation, we loitered outside by the riverbank for over an hour, while the microphone crackled with prayer and sermons inside a nearly empty shrine.

This break gave me a chance to estimate attendance. I put the total number of participants at two thousand. Reza and his friends boosted the number to three to four thousand, adding that Leh's Muharram was more popular, with a turnout of six thousand. The people attending today's Asad, they told me, included not only residents of Chushot but also guests from Leh and the nearby villages of Shey, Phyang, and Thikse.

We re-entered the *matam-serai*, and gradually the mood changed. At the beginning of the day the speakers had been told that each would be allotted no more than a quarter of an hour; those going overtime would be warned to finish by an electric buzzer pressed by members of the committee. Glad not to have to lecture overlong in Urdu, I delivered my talk in less than ten minutes. I was pleased with myself that I did not get buzzered. But all the other speakers went overtime; and after the midday prayer break the sermons grew ever lengthier.

The emotional register became heightened as well. From 3:30 to 5:30, the last few preachers all gave sermons in Ladakhi dwelling on the sufferings of the martyrs. The hall filled up; those who entered stayed; idle chatting ceased. From the women's gallery began a thin high keening of lamentation.

This set the tone for the *majlis*'s final sermon, an hour-long oration delivered by the chief maulvi of Chushot Yoghma. His status was clearly privileged: no buzzer dared reprimand him. He began prosaically enough, explaining the significance of the Day of the Lion: how Husain died in the heat of Asad, and how this necessitated a summertime commemoration to supplement Muharram. Gradually his voice swelled as he described the horrors of Karbala: the martyrs' thirst, the killing of Husain, the humiliation of the captives. The congregation sobbed and slapped themselves. By the

time he reached the description of Zuljenah—the horse returning riderless and bloody from the battlefield—the mullah's hands were flailing the air, his voice rising to a nonstop bellow. Not as loud, I thought, as the artillery fire on the Kashmir-to-Ladakh highway, but almost.

Suddenly he stood. A stallion caparisoned to represent Zuljenah was led into the crowded shrine. I thought I recognized the animal. "Yes," confirmed Reza, "it's the same horse that's used for Muharram in Leh." I also recognized its trappings: a peacock headdress, a shield and bloodstained turban, an open Qur'an mounted atop the saddle.

The sequence of events from this point was much like Leh's Ashura. The horse was led first to the pulpit, then on a circuit of the shrine's interior, followed by a procession of men bearing *tazia* coffins. Congregants pushed forward to touch the horse. Youth group members from various villages claimed space inside the shrine. Loudly these young men pounded their chests and chorused the words of a hymn. Each group tried to out-shout its neighbors: the same confusion I remembered from 1997.

I followed Zuljenah as it was led from the *matam-serai*. Outside a crowd of over a thousand jostled for a view of the horse. Through the press I glimpsed a cluster of teenagers striking themselves on the head with *zanjir* flails. So much for Khamenei's fatwa.

Zuljenah was led away; the Day of the Lion was over. Idlers elbowed up to me and asked for another photo. A mullah I'd never seen before—he told me he was from Thikse, but I was too tired to catch his name—took me by the arm and decided I needed a lecture on the impropriety of the Sunni concept of the caliphate. "People should never be allowed to vote on appointments made by God. Our job is simply to recognize the leader appointed by God. Remember that."

I promised I would try to.

Reza rescued me. "Ready to go home?"

We slipped through the crowd, called out good-byes, and walked up a dirt road by the river leading to the Choglamsar Bridge. On the other shore was the motor-stand where we would find a bus back to Leh.

On the way to the bridge we were overtaken by a truck draped in black mourning banners. Its freight bed was packed with boys who stood and clutched the cargo railings as the truck jounced over the path. They were singing something.

"*Durood*," said Reza: praise-chant.

As the truck passed I could hear the words. "*Salla Allah 'ala al-nabi wa-alihi*," they sang. "God's blessings on the Prophet, and on the Prophet's family."

The truck crossed the Choglamsar Bridge ahead of us. We crossed on foot a few minutes later. Beneath the metal planking surged the waters of the Indus.

An early evening breeze met us on the bridge. Prayer flags flapped from the struts overhead. Faintly came the chant on the wind. "God's blessings on the Prophet, and on the Prophet's family."

T E N

Shia Encounters in the United States: Notes on Teaching the Shia Tradition in American Classrooms

INTRODUCTION: MUHARRAM IN CHICAGO

The first thing that struck me about Muharram in Chicago was how familiar much of it seemed.

We had just moved to the Midwest, Jody and I, after my being hired by Loyola University's Department of Theology. Knowing that Chicago is a prime population center for immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, I guessed that the city must have an active Shia Muslim community. I was right.

Within a few weeks of our arrival, in May 1994, I learned of a Shia organization called "Masom." Its headquarters comprise an unobtrusive building on West Addison Street in Chicago. No minarets, no star-and-crescent banners, nothing to mark it as Muslim or Shia. To the street it presents a blank and bare exterior, lacking any identification save a small sign offering the one word "Masom." Not a helpful marker for the uninitiated. The first time I saw the place, I thought: Yes, they've brought over the old tradition of *taqiyah*: protective dissimulation, hiding, secrecy for fear of persecution.

The name Masom, I knew, had to have been derived from the Arabic word *ma'sum*, "immaculate," "sinless," "infallible," an honorific term applied to the Prophet Muhammad, Fatima, and the twelve Imams (who are known collectively as the *Chowdeh Ma'sumeen* or the "Immaculate Fourteen"). But here

in Chicago, I learned, the term also served as an acronym for the title "Midwest Association of Shia Organized Muslims."

My host in the visit to Masom was someone I'll call Seyyed Taqi. A sensitive and thoughtful individual, he proved to be an ideal guide, enduring my endless questions with patience and good humor. Like many Masom congregants, he is of Muhajir background. Originally from India, his family had emigrated to Pakistan after partition. "Muhajir" first referred to those seventh-century Muslims who made the hijrah from Mecca to Medina to join with Muhammad in establishing the *umma*, the Muslim community. The use of the term in twentieth-century South Asia conferred a heroic status on those Indian Muslims willing to leave their homeland at independence to join the new Islamic nation of Pakistan.

Seyyed Taqi and his wife Ruqayya took Jody and me to witness Masom's *Sham-e ghariban* observance, held on June 20, 1994. *Sham-e ghariban*, "the night of the wretched," designates the aftermath of Karbala, specifically the emotional state of the surviving women and children of Husain's family after his death and the defeat of his forces by Yazid's soldiers. It is held in the evening, at the conclusion of the day of Ashura.

Much felt familiar. The setting: hot and crowded, elbow-to-elbow (Chicago in the summer offers a fair approximation of the heat in Indian locales such as Hyderabad). The segregation: Ruqayya took Jody off to the women's section, marked by a black curtain, where the children ran about and a closed-circuit television broadcasted the mullah's sermon. The evident affection (something I have always liked) displayed among friends: the hugs and lingering handshakes and lengthy inquiries after health and family. Some of the men I met that night proved to be what one might call Muharram Muslims, Shias who—like Easter Christians—come to services once a year.

Adding to the back-in-India feeling that night was the language of the evening's service: Urdu. The liturgy opened with *marsiyeh* dirges, followed immediately by a forty-minute sermon. Also familiar was the preacher's delivery, the same style I remembered from numberless *majalis* in Hyderabad and Leh: keyed-up, emotional, harsh. And above all, loud. The mullah started with a bellow and increased the volume from there.

What follows is my journal summary from that evening:

> The theme of his sermon is focused exclusively on evoking the battle-field scene after Karbala and the death of Husain: the sufferings of the surviving women and children: tents in flames, the frenzied search for the *Chhauta Imam*, the fourth Imam, Husain's son Zayn al-Abidin, who

lies ill in his tent. "He is our leader now," say the captives. "We must do nothing without orders from him."

Zaynab sees that all the children are accounted for, save Sakina; greatly distressed, she searches the battlefield for her. Corpses everywhere, on all sides, of animals, men, *Ahl-e Bayt* alike. The preacher offers a cataloguing of the corpses of the martyrs.

Finally Zaynab finds Sakina asleep on the breast of her headless father Husain. (This after much frantic calling: "Sakina, where are you?") Sakina awakes and explains that she has always slept at her father's breast.

Zaynab asks, "How did you know that this—headless, stripped, amidst all these corpses—was your father?"

"A voice called to me," explains Sakina, "as I walked about the battlefield, and I knew it was he."

Zaynab says that some water has finally arrived; the captives are now permitted to drink.

Sakina: "But everyone's thirsty."

Zaynab: "Yes, but the youngest should drink first."

Sakina: "In that case, let Ali Asghar drink first. He's younger than I am. Where is he? My little brother, where is he?" [Note the preacher's use of dramatic irony to heighten the pathos: we in the congregation are aware, as Sakina is not, that the infant Ali Asghar has been mercilessly slaughtered.]

"My little brother, where is he?" These are the closing lines of the *khutba* (sermon), delivered in nothing less than a shriek by the preacher, accompanied by choking sounds as he weeps at the same time. Then in a sob the preacher begins repeating the words "Husain, Husain," as a call to *matam*.

There is a confused rush at this point. The young men of Ghulaman-e Abbas [a local Shia group, to be discussed below] push their way forward, echoing the cry "Husain, Husain" and striking themselves irregularly. But someone else, a slightly older man (one of the group's officers, I'm told later), stretches out his right arm commandingly and begins chanting the phrase *Sham-e ghariban*, to a more stately rhythm. Slowly, with great dignity, he repeats the phrase, drawing out the words: *Sham-e ghariban, ay sham-e ghariban*, or: "Night of the wretched, O night of the wretched."

In a moment all the young men are performing alternate-stroke two-handed *matam* in time to this phrase. Then they begin to chant verses to an Urdu *nauha* with this *sham-e ghariban* refrain. During the brief

verses the intensity of *matam* increases. The young men raise their arms higher for the stroke, they flex their knees more and sway their torsos more from side to side: a style akin to the Anjuman-e Ma'sumeen of Hyderabad, in its rhythmic movement, but stronger, more intense. During the *sham-e ghariban* refrain, the men relax and decrease the intensity of their *matam* blows, reducing the slaps to light alternate-hand taps to the chest.

This goes on for twenty minutes. Seyyed Taqi says to me, "Hot enough for you?" I suspect he wants to leave and I ask him whether he's ready. But he says no. Finally after another ten minutes, he says, "Let's go." The congregation is still doing the same *sham-e ghariban matam*, with lines of young men in the center of the hall setting the pace, some thirty of them. Older men at the periphery keep time with gentler strokes. We go over to the purdah and ask some of the women outside if they'd go in and signal Ruqayya and Jody that we're ready to leave.

From the above notes it can be seen that just as in Hyderabad and Leh, a *matami guruh* was very much in evidence at the service. Its name was Anjuman-e Ghulaman-e Abbas, "the Association of the Slaves of Abbas." Its members for the most part seemed to be young men in their teens and twenties, who made a point (as described above) of leading the congregation in the performance of bare-handed *matam*. After the *majlis* I asked one of the *anjuman*'s members whether the bloodier forms of *matam* were performed here in Chicago as in India and Pakistan. In reply he told me an interesting anecdote.

"A group of us used to do *zanjir-zani*," he said, "not here, but in someone's home not far from here. Then one day one of the neighbors walked by and saw us through the window beating ourselves. She called the police and they came over and saw all the blood and said, 'What are you people doing?' They didn't arrest us or anything, but after that we decided no more *zanjirs*."

For me, *Sham-e ghariban* had been a productive evening; but it was marred by one unpleasant incident. As we were leaving, my host Seyyed Taqi presented me to one of the senior officers of Masom (who shall remain nameless), an unsmiling bearded gentleman, my age, perhaps, or a little older. No sooner had I been introduced than the bearded one turned to Seyyed Taqi and said, "Has he become a Muslim yet?" The man kept his face averted from me.

Seyyed Taqi, embarrassed beyond words, said nothing. Lightly I replied that becoming Muslim wasn't my goal, at least not in the denomina-

tional sense; but I hoped that my study of Islam had made me a better person and a better Christian. I added that Christians and Muslims are both "people of the Book" and share more similarities than differences.

This made him look straight at me. "I hear that you are a professor," he began, and then he said something to the effect that he didn't understand how someone who was supposedly so educated could study so much and yet remain unenlightened and fail to convert to Islam.

I don't recall his exact words. What I do remember with precision is his parting comment. "I will pray for you," he announced. I also remember the expression on his face: open hostility. If looks could land one in hell and a frown fix one's fate for all time, I'd be roasting on Jehennum coals right now.

REMINISCENCES FROM THE CLASSROOM

This encounter with the gentleman from Chicago's Masom reminded me of a truth I had experienced before: a scholar of Islam who shows no intention of converting generates tension, becomes, in the minds of some, a threat.

This is something I have met with as an instructor of Islamic Studies at various universities in the United States. At four institutions—Colgate University (in upstate New York), the University of Pennsylvania (in Philadelphia), Loyola University (in Chicago), and Santa Clara University (in California's Bay area)—I have offered both introductory courses on Islam and upper-level classes on Shiism. I have been on the receiving end of diverse reactions, some positive, some negative. I will begin with the criticisms voiced by Sunni Muslim students on the campuses where I have taught (not all of these students, it should be noted, ever actually took a course with me, but this did not stop critics from offering their opinion).

The objections to my presence in the classroom have been of three kinds. The first can be described as a generalized resentment of the notion of a non-Muslim teaching Islam. Some students have said that my secret intention must be to denigrate Islam. Others (many of them not at all hostile, but of a sincere and conscientious disposition) have worried aloud that if I—a teacher whom they respect—have studied Islam for so long and yet have not converted, then I must have found Islam somehow deficient. Over the years I have spent considerable time reassuring such students that my failure to convert implies no deficiency in their tradition but rather has to do with the very special nature of my work as an educator (a point to which I return below).

The second objection has to do with the idea of my introducing courses into the curriculum focusing on Shiism. "God is one; Islam is one" goes the refrain I have often heard from certain Muslim students (I encountered such talk in Chicago more often than anywhere else I have taught, usually in dealing with the children of Sunni immigrants from Pakistan). In one lecture at Loyola on early Islamic history, I was interrupted by a zealous undergraduate who objected to my use of the words Sunni and Shia. "You are bringing *fitna* [discord]," he said. "You are trying to divide up Islam." He went on to say that there is no need for labels such as Sunni or Shia. There are Muslims and there are *kafirs*. Period. (This is a familiar argument, one I ran into from time to time back in India.) Another student argued—rather cleverly, I thought—that it was just like a Christian to take his own faction-minded Catholic-Protestant history and impose this model on Islam.

The third objection strikes me as the most substantive. My classes on Shiism always include coverage of Muharram rituals, of self-flagellation and blood. What I teach "blackens Islam," as one Sunni put it: I indulge in sensationalism. *Matam* is disgusting, according to this argument. Discussion of such things serves only to alienate people from Islam. Such criticisms echo Ayatollah Khamenei's fatwa prohibiting bloody *matam* as a practice that harms Islam's reputation in the eyes of the world (a point discussed in previous chapters).

In various classroom discussions I have replied to the above objections as follows. First, as a non-Muslim who has studied Islam and lived and worked in Muslim societies, I offer a special perspective—imperfect, admittedly, and idiosyncratic, but nevertheless of worth. An outsider to the tradition, neither Sunni nor Shia, I am sympathetic to the Shias but am also capable of a certain emotional distance from the object of my study. I believe that my outsider status, while making me the target of critiques, has nevertheless facilitated a certain kind of conversation. At least some of my Muslim students have felt free to ask controversial questions (whether openly in the classroom or privately in my office), questions, they tell me, that they would never dare to ask of a Muslim authority for fear of giving offense or appearing to be untrue to the faith.

As for the charge that I introduce *fitna*: I remind my students that it is already there. Discord and division already exist. I use the terms Sunni and Shia because they correspond to a historical reality. Such vocabulary, I say, allows us to discuss this reality, messy as it is, with its discords and differences. Acknowledging difference is the first step in addressing the issues linked to Sunni-Shia divisions, a point to which I return below.

And as for the third charge, that bloody *matam* and the like are disgusting, and that talk of such things should be kept out of the classroom: my reply is that the disgusting often offers a unique opportunity to learn. When we stop to reflect on why a given religious custom is repugnant, we may come to understand something of the disturbing quality of the unfamiliar, of how dependent are labels such as "disgusting" on the degree to which something is reassuringly well known to us.

For example, I remind my students who come from Christian backgrounds (such students make up the majority in the courses I have taught) that icons of Jesus's crucifixion show scenes of an event that is at base revolting: the violent torture and killing of an exposed and defenseless victim. For Christians, it is familiarity, coupled with understanding, that makes the crucifix a source of comfort rather than disgust.

This was the lesson learned by the sixteenth-century Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci when he brought to China a favorite crucifix. "Beautiful," was the way he described it, "carved out of wood, with blood painted on it, so it seemed alive." The Jesuit was surprised by the reaction of Chinese individuals to the sight of his crucifix. One court official, according to Ricci, "truly thought it was something evil." Another Chinese acquaintance asserted that it was "not good to have someone looking like that." When this object was discovered among Ricci's belongings, he was confronted with the threat of violence. "[I]n the face of the hostile crowd," says the missionary's biographer, Jonathan Spence, "Ricci found it hard to marshal an adequate explanation of the significance of Christ crucified . . . he saw all the people turned against him, full of disgust."[1]

So, too, I tell my students, with regard to Shia Islam and the practice of bloody *matam*. What impresses the insider as beautiful will make the uninitiated become "full of disgust." Spilt blood serves to separate. Blood marks communal boundaries, as surely as it did for the Israelites in Egypt in marking doorposts to keep off the Angel of Death. But what repels the outsider carries special meanings for the insider, where *matam* blood calls up associations with generosity, heroism, and sacrifice. Our job in the classroom, I tell my students, is to get past our initial repugnance sufficiently to see the "disgusting" with the eyes of insiders.

I use a specific technique to engage such issues in the classroom. Halfway through my Shiism course, once students have been introduced to the requisite history and doctrine, I invite any Shia Muslims who wish to do so to research a controversial practice and then offer an in-class presentation to their colleagues. I ask them specifically in their talks to address the

question of what, if anything, such practices mean to them as members of the Shia tradition.

The idea for such presentations came to me in Chicago in 1996, when Sunni students sometimes interrupted my lectures to tell the class at large why the rituals I was describing did not pertain to Islam at all. Shias in the class initially sat silent. Then several came to me in my office and asked for fifteen minutes of class time for a sustained rebuttal, in which they might talk to the class about controversial beliefs and rituals—*matam*, intercession, and the infallible perfection of the Imams were some of the favorite topics—with the understanding that questions and ripostes would be reserved for the end of each talk.

After the first such presentation, the Sunnis descended on me to demand equal time. "Let's make it a debate," said one: fifteen minutes apiece for Shia and Sunni views on a given topic, followed by open discussion. I said fine but then added an admonition. Directing my attention to a pair of puritanically-minded young men who fancied themselves Wahhabi fire-eaters, I told them that in an academic debate Muslim/*kafir* dichotomies and "Islam-is-one" vacuities wouldn't make the grade.

"Clarify your position," I coached them, and I turned them loose on *The Deliverance From Error*, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali's twelfth-century spiritual autobiography (Ghazali was very much a defender of the Sunni tradition against the heterodoxies of his day). My Sunni students learned of Ghazali's attacks on *ta'lim* ("authoritative instruction"), a Shia doctrine concerning the need for believers to give complete obedience to the teachings of the infallible Imam. In reading Ghazali and preparing for their presentations, my students sharpened their understanding of a distinguishing feature of Sunnism: an emphasis on the need for the individual to preserve independence of judgment rather than yield unquestioning submission to any human authority.[2]

My Shia students, for their part, found that in order to talk intelligently about rituals they had grown up with but only half understood, they had to engage in ethnographic fieldwork in their own communities. They talked to *maulvis* in local shrines, collected oral histories from uncles and grandmothers, and interviewed older family members at home.

The result: some of the liveliest class discussions I have ever presided over. Taking care to head off the occasional ad hominem zinger, in these debates I became referee rather than lecturer, a refreshing change of role. These talks also offered an eye-opener for my non-Muslim students, who learned (they told me so in their end-of-semester evaluations) that ritual and doctrine are things that matter.

BEING SHIA, BEING AMERICAN: CHALLENGES FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

A different kind of interdenominational exchange took place the following year, when I moved to California and accepted a teaching position in Santa Clara University's Department of Religious Studies. Once more I offered my Shiism course; and at semester's end one of my Shia students paid me the compliment of inviting me to speak at her mosque in the city of Pomona. Most of the congregants, she explained, are first- and second-generation Iraqi immigrant families. The talk took place in December, 1997; the topic: "Being Shia and Being American."

I confess I was a little worried as to how the congregation would react to a non-Muslim's lecturing them in their own mosque on their own faith. And my worries were not altogether misplaced. Just before the talk began, several gentlemen approached me and abruptly demanded, "Why haven't you become Muslim?" I offered a variant of my standard reply. I thought I was more useful, I said, as a Christian who tried to serve as a bridge between traditions and as a friendly critic. Ultimately, I added, the congregation would have to be the judge of my usefulness.

Their response was courteous but guarded. I saw I had my work cut out for me.

I began my lecture by observing that nowadays being Shia and being American in all likelihood poses no problem as long as one doesn't go public with one's religious identity. The United States has a longstanding mind-your-own-business attitude with regard to issues of personal privacy, one that coincides with the longstanding Shia custom of *taqiyah*: religious dissimulation, taking care to avoid calling attention to oneself as a Shia. Problems arise, I speculated, when one decides to "come out" as a Shia, when a minority religious community decides to raise its voice because it believes it has something distinctive to offer to the nation's religious dialogue. In fact, I said, the Shia community does have a distinctive contribution to make, the nature of which I will suggest in more detail below.

Shia Muslims in this country face two challenges in identifying themselves openly as Shia. The first is ignorance and prejudice on the part of the American non-Muslim public at large.[3] The second is hostility from Sunni Muslims. The latter, it seems to me, is the greater challenge, because Sunni disapproval plays into Shia fears, fears of seeming to break ranks, of causing *fitna*, of violating an instinct for Muslim solidarity in the face of non-Muslim misunderstanding.

Despite such ambivalence, American Shias have experimented with assertions of their identity as not only Muslim but Shia. In 1994 I witnessed one such experiment in downtown Chicago, a midday Ashura procession at the Daley Center Plaza, right beside the giant Picasso sculpture well-known to tourists. The event was sponsored by the Anjuman-e Ghulaman-e Abbas, the association I encountered at Masom headquarters.

The experiment, as far as I could tell, was not a huge success. This Ashura procession was to be an outward-directed display. "Educational," as one *anjuman* member said to me in describing the march's purpose. "We want to show the world how we love *Ahl-e Bayt*." With this educational end in mind, two boys stood about offering to passersby English-language leaflets (not very well written, it must be said) with the title "Muharram: What Is It?"

I am not confident that passersby would have gained any clearer sense of what Muharram is by watching the procession. Several dozen men dressed in black *kurtas* led the march, slapping their chests in bare-handed *matam* and chanting Urdu *nauhas*. *Alams* were held aloft; their pennons fluttered in the windy plaza. One banner was decorated with the silhouette of Zuljenah; another bore an inscription in Urdu: *Ya Ghazi 'Abbas 'Alamdar* (Hail, Abbas, holy warrior, standard-bearer). A line of women, also in black, followed; they had custody of a *tazia* on wheels and a *jhulha* (a cradle—with dollar-bill donations affixed—symbolizing Ali Asghar, Husain's martyred infant son). "Husain, Husain," called out marchers from time to time.

For me, familiar trappings; but something was off. Every Muharram gathering I had ever attended in India had been spirited, energetic, emotionally a bit overwhelming. This Chicago march seemed self-conscious, flat. And no wonder. As the *jalus* proceeded along West Washington Street and crossed North Dearborn, it had to contend with carhorns, jackhammers, a rush of pedestrians converging on a hotdog stand. "Let's move it along, ladies," urged a policewoman as the last of the procession straggled across the street. The marchers' mood seemed inward-turned. I saw no interactions with the public, no conversations that might have informed individual onlookers, no attempts at explanation save the poorly-worded leaflets (and these sheets did not describe the ritual action being presented or elucidate the symbolism of the objects displayed on the march).

If the participants were uncomfortable, passersby were puzzled. One lunch-time pedestrian paused beside me. "Why are they hitting themselves?" I tried to give him a one-minute summary of Shia Islam, but he looked at his watch and hurried off.

To borrow a phrase from Ronald Grimes in his book *Ritual Criticism*, the morning's procession was an example of an "infelicitous performance."

Grimes argues that "in instances of ritual 'opacity' a ceremony or some element in it is experienced as meaningless; the act is unrecognizable or uninterpretable. Either it fails to communicate or it communicates such conflicting messages that someone—either participant or observer—fails to grasp its sense."[4] The march may have worked as an instance of communal self-assertion—there was a vague air of defiance to the participants, and one must credit their courage in marching before uncomprehending onlookers—but as an educational attempt, as a bridge-building experiment in communication, it was less than successful.

It seems to me, I told my Pomona audience, that American Shias should define more precisely what it is that they wish to communicate in any dialogue with the larger public. I believe that Shiism does have distinctive insights to offer in religious dialogue, insights linked to its theology of suffering.

Unfortunately, until now such a theology has typically been deployed to demarcate communal boundaries. Many Shia theologians and political leaders have interpreted the Karbala tragedy and the subsequent history of the persecution of the Imams in such a way as to portray Shias as victims who await the vindication of Judgment Day, when the earth will be violently purged of the unrighteous majority who currently hold power. Examine the following verses from a medieval litany to the Mahdi (according to Shia belief, the Mahdi is a sinless descendant of the Prophet Muhammad who will appear on earth to inaugurate the end of time and the beginning of the Final Judgment): "On that day you will raise high the banner of conquest, and you will see us surround you as you fill the land with your presence . . . You will make your enemies taste humiliation and punishment. The arrogant, the violent, those who have denied the truth: all these you will destroy."[5]

The mood of these verses is reflected in an essay by the twentieth-century Iranian political activist Ali Shari'ati (d. 1977). The essay, entitled "*Thar*" (a word meaning "retaliation," "revenge," or "blood feud"), sets out to explain the significance of one of the Mahdi's honorific titles, *al-Muntaqim* ("the Avenger").

"What will he avenge?" announces Shari'ati of the Mahdi. "Everyone says, 'He will avenge the murder of the *Sayyid al-Shuhada* (Master of *Shuhada* [Martyrdom]), Husayn.' Not at all! He will avenge the *thar* for which the tribe of Cain is responsible."[6]

To understand this view it is necessary to study Shari'ati's vision of the battle of Karbala. "Ashura," he argues, "is not a one-and-a-half-day event. It is the issue of the eternity of history." That is, the death of the

innocent victim Husain at Karbala comprised the continuation of a historical pattern that had first been articulated with Cain's murder of the innocent victim Abel. "It is then," asserts Shari'ati, "that the bi-polarity of human society has begun." According to this model of history, the "tribe of Cain" (also called by Shari'ati the "tribe of *taghut*," the word *taghut* referring to the pagan idols of the Jahiliyah) has persecuted the "tribe of Abel" since the beginning of time. He identifies Abel's spiritual descendants as "members of the tribe of God," who rise up "in every generation for revenge against the tribe of *taghut*, from whom blood is owed . . . After Adam, humanity divides into two tribes, the tribe of *taghut* and the tribe of God, which division Islam has recognized. Without such duality, Islam cannot be understood." The genius of the Prophet Muhammad, Shari'ati concludes, was to substitute religious loyalty for family loyalty and religious vendetta for family feud. Thus Shari'ati elaborates the victim status of Shias in their suffering into a dichotomized worldview of conflict and retaliation that will end only with the coming of the Mahdi.[7]

Shari'ati's cosmic vendetta-vision was continued in more recent years by the Ayatollah Khomeini, who undertook to unite the Iranian nation around his *taghut*/Islam dualism. And it is worth noting that the tendency is still evident today in Iran. Even as President Mohammad Khatami explored the possibility of dialogue with the West in the spring of 1999, the Iranian government announced the arrest of thirteen Iranian Jews on charges of espionage. Various officials claimed that these Jews were part of a vast Zionist conspiracy to harm the Islamic Republic. The arrests may well have been arranged by conservative elements within the government eager to embarrass Khatami and sustain Khomeinist confrontationalism.[8]

Can one discern any recent attempts at Shia self-definition that are less confrontational than the Shari'ati-Khomeini model, and that offer more hope for constructive religious dialogue in the United States? In 1995 a Lebanese scholar named Muhammad Husain al-Faqih published a treatise called *Li-madha ana shi'i* ("Why Am I a Shia?"). He begins with a statement of his pride in defying majority opinion (that of the Sunnis) in his adherence to Shia principles. Later he develops what might be called the social justice dimension of Muharram ritual, by arguing that commemorating Karbala helps in the "immortalizing of the echo of Husain's uprising" against tyranny and oppression.[9]

So far, nothing too startlingly new. But he goes on to evoke the terrors of the battle of Karbala (in a style showing affinities with the genre of the traditional *majlis* sermon), following which he offers an interesting comment: "Truly I say to you, words fail in describing that scene. As for me, I feel

something now in myself which I cannot convey to you, something which is a mixture of admiration and exaltation, of pity and compassion and sympathy, something expressed by my tears, which flow involuntarily."[10]

With his evoking of exaltation, sympathy, and piety, with his reference to the tears that express what cannot otherwise be said, al-Faqih suggests something of what Shia identity means to him. But, I asked my Pomona audience, might it be possible to articulate further that which is most characteristically Shia in worldview and theological insight, so as to contribute more actively to religious dialogue in this country?

A celebrated passage from the writings of anthropologist Clifford Geertz is applicable to this question of Shia insights and interfaith dialogue: "As a religious problem, the problem of suffering is, paradoxically, not how to avoid suffering but how to suffer, how to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat, or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable, supportable—something, as we say, sufferable."[11] That is to say: suffering, whether prolonged physical pain or emotional torment, threatens us with absurdity, with loss of meaning, especially when we contemplate the suffering of the innocent. Our world order is threatened with collapse. How, we ask, could a good God permit such things to happen?

Shiism faces the existential reality of suffering head-on and rescues it from absurdity. Shiism makes suffering sufferable by identifying an outstanding historical instance of torment—Husain's death at Karbala—and explaining it in the language of martyrdom and voluntary sacrifice. Shia typologists have enlarged the explanatory matrix to include other exemplars of righteous innocence from Abel to Abraham, from Jesus to Muhammad and his descendants, in such a way as to comprehend the whole sweep of history.

The general tendency in Shia religious and political thought has been to explore suffering as the consequence of human evil localized in specific figures such as Cain and Yazid, who become linked in a network across time (Shari'ati's "tribe of *taghut*") responsible for all injustice, tyrannies, and conspiracies of oppression. Thus suffering becomes a function of dichotomized oppositions that can be extended infinitely in a binary series: Cain-Abel, Yazid-Husain, Ottoman-Safavid, America-Iran.

The strength of such a system is that it is convenient for establishing easily discernible communal boundary markers, with the innocent on the inside, defending themselves from oppressors on the outside. The system's weakness is that it facilitates the displacement of responsibility from self to other, from the in-group perceived as blameless to the external perceived as enemy.

But could the reality of suffering become a way to unite rather than polarize? Shia theology offers a structural similarity to Christianity in that each honors an exemplar of martyrdom and innocent suffering: Husain and Jesus. But Shia thought could be enriched by a study of the changes in Roman Catholic thought with regard to Christ's Passion. Until the twentieth century, Christian sorrow in recollecting the Crucifixion has often been transmuted into virulent anti-Semitism, with attempts to fix the blame for Christ's sufferings on the Jews. Not until the Second Vatican Council in 1965 did the Catholic Church formally repudiate the charge of deicide.[12] Doing so has allowed the Church to enhance a different aspect of the theology of the Passion, one that has been present to at least some degree for centuries: our ongoing personal responsibility for Jesus's sufferings. The old pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic *Sunday Missal* offers the following prayer-meditation for the observance of the Palm Sunday mass: "We carry palm branches as a tribute of waving joy, before Christ, victorious over death; also as a symbol of our wavering fickleness, betraying Christ unto His Death."[13] It includes the following meditation to be recited by the individual Catholic after the reading of the Gospel account of Jesus's Crucifixion: "I believe that we should be ready to suffer the loss of all earthly joys, even to welcome death itself, rather than commit one mortal sin; that when tempted, I should immediately think of Hell on the one hand and of Christ crucified on the other; and that mortal sin tramples on His Wounds and Precious Blood."[14]

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Hierarchy of the Netherlands commissioned a wide-ranging compendium of Christian teachings, published in English under the title *A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults*. The first part of this catechism, in chapters entitled "The Grandeur and Misery of Man," "The Desire of Our Conscience," and "The Call for the Infinite," contextualizes the Passion as a function of universal existential realities. Only then does it explore Christ's crucifixion: "The Father did not will the pain and the death, but a noble and beautiful human life. That it ended in such a death was due to us. Jesus did not shrink from it . . . At the same time he delivers us from being merely men. Even calamity is not a lonely fate, since it means that we pass through it along with Christ, our Lord and fellow-man. Suffering does not cease to be hard. But it loses the character of blind fate."[15]

Thus Christ's meaningful and voluntary suffering becomes understood as a response to the limitations of the human condition, rather than as the result of the machinations of a guilty few from the remote past. We, too, in the present day are implicated, by virtue of our human tendency to sin. This leaves open the way for individuals to insert themselves spiritually into the

Passion and accept both the burden of personal responsibility for Christ's sufferings and the consolation of solidarity and shared human experience in these same sufferings.

It will be up to Shia thinkers, of course, to decide on the relevance of the above. But it seems to me at least possible for the theology of Karbala to be developed in such a way as to discourage conspiracy-mongering and vendettas and instead encourage reflection, self-criticism, and spiritual interiority. The latter values are already present in Shiism, as is demonstrated in the texts quoted in my discussion of intercession in chapter eight. It is a question of fostering what already exists in the tradition. But if American Shias choose to develop Karbala theology so as to combine the motifs of social justice and personal responsibility, they will be in a position to make common cause with the other Abrahamic traditions against the consumerist materialism so prevalent in the United States today.

In sketching the outlines of a theology of Karbala, I am suggesting the possibility of a spirituality that is both universal and distinctively Shia. In doing so, I told my Pomona audience, I am influenced by Christian ecumenism. Rather than indulge in mutual anathemas, Protestants and Catholics in recent years have slowly come to acknowledge that each denomination has something important to say, that Protestantism, with its emphasis on the need for individual believers to encounter God directly in the scriptural word, and Catholicism, with its emphasis on God's physical and sacramental presence in the world, together offer complementary aspects of the same message.

So, too, I believe, with Islam. *Pace* my student critics from the classroom, there is in fact a need for the labels Sunni and Shia, for worldviews that emphasize (as with Ghazali) the importance of independence of judgment or that articulate (via meditations on Karbala) a theology of suffering. Allowing for such a diversity of Islamic views, it seems to me, is preferable to *takfir* (indulging in denunciation and excommunication, declaring a fellow Muslim to be a *kafir*, or unbeliever).

I ended my talk at Pomona by quoting from the Qur'an: "If God had wanted, He could have made you a single community. But He did not, in order to test you by means of what He has given you. Therefore compete with each other in good works. Unto God is your return, all of you. Thereupon He will enlighten you as to those things concerning which you once differed." Such verses, I said in conclusion, can be understood as a plea for denominationalism in place of *takfir*.[16]

The congregation's reaction to my talk, as might be expected, was mixed. But my best memory of the evening is a response from a young man

who had overheard the doubts voiced by some individuals before the presentation concerning my status as a non-Muslim. He came up to me and shook my hand and said, "It's better that you don't convert. You're doing more good being what you are."

That comment made the whole venture worthwhile.

Notes

CHAPTER ONE

1. D. T. Lindell, "Muharram in Hyderabad," *Al-Basheer: The Bulletin of the Christian Institute of Islamic Studies* (Hyderabad) 3, no. 1 (Jan.-March 1974), 24.
2. I first encountered the Persian text of this poem in a work by Bruce B. Lawrence, *Notes From a Distant Flute: Sufi Literature in Pre-Mughal India* (Teheran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978), 22.
3. Ahmad ibn al-Qasim ibn Abi Usaybi'ah, *'Uyun al-anba' fi tabaqat al-atibba'* (Beirut: Dar maktabat al-hayah, 1965), 642.

CHAPTER TWO

1. For more information on early Shia history, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 1-22. For Fatima's death from grief over the Prophet, see Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, *Usul al-kafi* (Teheran: Intisharat 'Ilmiyah Islamiyah, n.d.), with Persian translation and commentary by Sayyid Jawad Mustafawi, vol. 2, 355-56. For other incidents in the life of Fatima, see Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14-15.
2. Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 194-95.
3. I. K. A. Howard, trans., *The History of al-Tabari, volume 19: The Caliphate of Yazid b. Mu'awiyah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 74-75, 87-88.
4. S. Husain M. Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (London: Longman Group, 1979), 198-205; Momen, 31-33.
5. For an introduction to the topic of intercession in the Shia tradition see D. Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 17-19.
6. Rafiq Zakaria, *The Struggle Within Islam* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 396-97; Momen, op. cit., 277. Compare with Nadeem Hasnain and Abrar Husain, *Shias and Shia Islam in India* (Delhi: Harnam Publications, 1988), 225, who estimate the Shia population to be somewhat larger.
7. Clarence Maloney, *Peoples of South Asia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1974), 158.

8. J. R. I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 117.
9. Hasnain and Husain, op. cit., 195-200; Hashmia Kamil, "Karbala and the People of India," and Abu Talib, "Relations of Indians with Imam Husain," both in Mehdi Nazmi, ed., *Red Sand* (Delhi: Abu Talib Academy, 1984), 157-77.
10. Munir D. Ahmed, "The Shi'is of Pakistan," in Martin Kramer, ed., *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 276.
11. John Norman Hollister, *Islam and Shia Faith in India* (Delhi: Taj Publications, 1989), 103.
12. Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India* (Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing, 1986), vol. 1, 251-52.
13. Quoted in Hollister, op. cit., 124.
14. Cole, op. cit., 24-26; Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 80-83.
15. Cole, op. cit., 38-41.
16. Ibid., 117.
17. P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 1-30; Cole, op. cit., 87-91, 249-50, 285-86.
18. Diana L. Eck, *Darshan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1985), 3, 87.
19. Cole, op. cit., 117.
20. Ibid., 224-27.
21. Hardy, op. cit., 29-30, 73-76; Cole, op. cit., 286-90.
22. Sandria B. Freitag, "Sunnis and Shi'a: From Community Identity to Communal Sectarianism in North Indian Islam," in Peter Gaeffke and David A. Utz, eds., *Identity and Division in Cults and Sects in South Asia* (Philadelphia: Proceedings of the South Asia Seminar, University of Pennsylvania, 1984), 142.
23. Ibid., 138.
24. Keith Hjortshoj, "Shi'i Identity and the Significance of Muharram in Lucknow, India," in Kramer, ed., *Shi'ism*, 290-91.
25. For a discussion of *taqiyah* see Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, 223-25.
26. Hjortshoj, op. cit., 304.
27. For more information on the history of Hyderabad and Muslim-Hindu devotional practices in that city, see Pinault, *Shiites*, 153-65.
28. T. Vedantam, ed., *Census of India 1971, Series 2, Andhra Pradesh: A Monograph on Muharram in Hyderabad City* (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1977), 12-13.
29. Pinault, op. cit., 158-62.

30. For more information on Ashura observances at Hyderabad's Hazrat Abbas shrine, see David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 143-45.
31. David Pinault, "Shi'a Muslim Men's Associations and the Celebration of Muharram in Hyderabad, India," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 16 (1992), 48-49.
32. Illustrations of the *alams* that are used in Hyderabad's Muharram rituals appear in Pinault, *Shiites*, plates 8-10. Plate 13 from the same text shows the *alams* carried at the Hazrat Abbas procession described in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Muhammad Jawad Maghaniyya, *al-Fiqh 'ala al-madhahib al-khamsah* (Beirut: Dar al-'ilm lil-malayin, 1962), 5.
2. Ibid.
3. Muhammad Abduh, "Islam, Reason, and Civilization," and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "Islam: The Religion of Reason and Nature," both in John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 24-28, 41-43. See also Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 43-83, especially Rahman's summary (on p. 52) of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's views: "Islam turns out to be, among the religions of the world, most in conformity with the laws of nature, and of all religious documents the Qur'an is the most rational."
4. Werner Ende, "The Flagellations of Muharram and the Shi'ite Ulama," *Der Islam* 55 (1978), 19-36.
5. Quoted in Seyyed Ali Khamenei, *'Ashura: bayyanat-e rehbar-e mu'azzam-e inqilab-e islami wa-istifta'at-e ayyat-e 'uzam piramun 'azadari-ye 'ashura* (Qom: Daftar-e tablighat-e islami-ye hawzeh-ye 'ilmiyah, 1994), 27.
6. Ibid., 29.
7. Anonymous, *Imamiyah diniyat: darajah davvom* (Lucknow: Tanzim al-makatib, 1993), 23.
8. A. Kevin Reinhart, "Impurity/No Danger," *History of Religions* 30, no. 1 (1990), 7.
9. Ibid., 19.
10. Michael Winter, "Islamic Attitudes Toward the Human Body," in Jane Marie Law, ed., *Religious Reflections on the Human Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 37.
11. Ira Lapidus, "Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of Adab and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam," in Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 47, 56.

12. David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 121-24.
13. The text appears in Khamenei, op. cit., 24.
14. Ibid., 28-29.
15. Winter, op. cit., 37.
16. Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), trans. Herbert Mason, vol. 1, 603-04.
17. Cited in Massignon, *Passion*, vol. 4, p. 46.
18. Maghaniyya, op. cit., 28.
19. Personal correspondence, March 10, 1998.
20. Ali b. Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufiism*, Reynold A. Nicholson, ed. and trans. (London: Luzac & Co., 1976), 194.
21. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 90.
22. Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 57-58.
23. Ibid., 61.
24. A. J. Arberry, trans., *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya' ("Memorial of the Saints") by Farid al-Din Attar* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 270.
25. Massignon, *Passion*, vol. 1, p. 603.
26. Hujwiri, op. cit., 195, 248.
27. Schimmel, op. cit., 19, 105.
28. Hujwiri, op. cit., 187.
29. Attar, *Conference of the Birds*, 206.
30. Ibid.
31. Louis Massignon, ed., *Kitab al-Tawasin par Abou al-Moghith al-Hosayn ibn Mansour al-Hallaj* (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1913), 16-17.
32. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 112-14.
33. Allamah Najm Effendi, "Parwaneh-ye Shabbir," in Mir Ahmed 'Ali, ed., *Karbala-wale: nauhajat-e anjuman-e parwaneh-ye shabbir* (Hyderabad: Maktab-e Turabia, 1989), 9.
34. Ali Javid Maqsud, "Zahra ki du'a," in *Yeh matam kayse ruk ja'ay: nauhe* (Hyderabad: Maktab-e Turabia, n.d), 8-9.
35. S. Ghulam Imam, trans., *What Happened at Karbala?: Being a Translation of the Book Majara fi Karbala by Hakim Mustafa Husain Sahib* (Lucknow: Madrasat-Ul-Waizeen, n.d.), 20.

36. Ibid.
37. Syed Hibat ud-Din al-Husaini ash-Shahristani, *The Rising of Husain* (Lucknow: Madrasat-Ul-Waizeen, 1977), 63.
38. Janab Rashid Shahidi, "Karbala hayy 'ala khayr al-'amal," in 'Ali, ed., *Karbala-wale*, 15-17.
39. Husain Sahib, *What Happened at Karbala?*, 22-23.
40. Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1985), 104.
41. Sa'id Shahidi, "Salam," in Agha Nasir Mashhadi, ed., *Ibn al-Zahra wawayla: majmu'a-ye muntakhab-e salam wa-nauhajat urdu farsi* (Hyderabad: Guruh-e Ja'fari, 1990), 62.
42. Mir Babar Ali Anis, *Anis ke salam*, Ali Javad Zaydi, ed. (Delhi: Taraqqi Urdu Biyuru, 1981), 281.
43. Gertrude Bell, trans., in Arthur J. Arberry, ed., *Hafiz: Fifty Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 96.
44. The Persian text can be found in Arberry, *Hafiz*, p.69. The translation is mine.
45. Ibid., 172.
46. Personal correspondence, March 20, 1998.
47. Uthman Asif Sabi', "Nauha," in Mashhadi, *Ibn al-Zahra*, 186.
48. Schimmel, op. cit., 299.
49. Ibid., 309.
50. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 216-17.
51. Mirza Farid Beg Farid, "Ay Husain jan, ay Husain jan," in *Du'a-ye Fatima: muntakhab-e nauhajat* (Hyderabad: Anjuman-e Ma'sumin, 1987), 2-3.
52. Shahzadah Hasan Reza, ed., *Bayaz-e matam (bissah savvom): muntakhab wa-taze nauhon ka majmu'ah* (Lahore: Ja'fariyah kutubkhanah, n.d.), 28.
53. For a discussion of the Sufi concept of *lisan al-hal*, see Schimmel, op. cit., 45, 306.
54. Mustafa Zaydi, "Ay Karbala, ay Karbala," in *Koh-e nida: nazmon aur ghazalon ka akhiri majmu'ah* (Karachi: Kutub Printers, 1971), 118-19.
55. Ibid., 119.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Ja'far Sharif, *Islam in India or the Qanun-i-Islam*, G. A. Herklots, trans. (London: Curzon Press reprint, 1972), 181.
2. Seyyed Mohammed al-Moosavi, "Your Questions . . . Our Answers," *Ja'fari Times* 2, no. 1 (Muharram 1409/Aug.–Sept. 1988), 8.

3. Mary Elaine Hegland, "The Power Paradox in Muslim Women's *Majales*: North-West Pakistani Mourning Rituals as Sites of Contestation over Religious Politics, Ethnicity, and Gender," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23 (1998), 391-428.
4. For a discussion of this sermon in relation to the topic of *majlis* liturgies and Shia self-definition, see David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 115-20.
5. Louis Massignon, "La mubahala de Medine et l'hyperdulie de Fatima," *Opera Minora* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), vol. 1, 550-72; "La notion du voeu et la devotion musulmane à Fatima," *Op. Minora* vol. 1, 573-91; "L'oratoire de Marie à l'Aqca, vu sous le voile de deuil de Fatima," *Op. Minora* vol. 1, 592-618.
6. Massignon, "La notion du voeu . . . ," 588-90.
7. Massignon, "Salman Pak et les premices spirituelles de l'Islam iranien," *Op. Minora* vol. 1, 474.
8. Massignon, "La mubahala de Medine . . . ," 571 n.1. For Fatima's death from grief over the Prophet, see Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, *Usul al-kafi* (Teheran: Intisharat 'Ilmiyah Islamiyah, n.d.), with Persian translation and commentary by Sayyid Jawad Mustafawi, vol. 2, 355-56. For other incidents in the life of Fatima, see Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14-15.
9. For a discussion of Fatima's sufferings in relation to the power of intercession, see Pinault, op. cit., 54-55, 106-07.
10. 'Abbas Qummi, *Mafatih al-jinan* (Teheran: Chapkhana-ye Muhammad 'Ali 'Ilmi, 1964). For a discussion of the material in the *Mafatih* see Mohammad Amir Haider Khan, *Prayers and Invocations*, Muaiyyid-ul-Uloom Series (Lucknow: Madrasat-ul-Waizeen, n.d.), 3-4, 30, 64. See also William C. Chittick, ed. and trans., *A Shi'ite Anthology* (Albany: State University of New York, 1981), 18.
11. Qummi, 100-01, 539-40, 574.
12. Kulayni, vol. 1, 349; cf. also vol. 1, 346-47.
13. Ibid., vol. 1, 278.
14. For a discussion of light-imagery in Islamic mysticism see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1975), 259-63 et passim; see also pp. 96, 214 for Sufi interpretations of Qur'an 24.35.
15. Louis Massignon, "Die Ursprünge und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus im Islam," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1937 (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1938), 64-65.
16. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 119.

17. For the interaction of prose and poetry in narrative performance settings see David Pinault, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 102-07, and the references cited therein.
18. Husain Wa'iz al-Kashifi, *Rawdat al-shuhada'* (Teheran: Intisharat Islamiyah, 1952), 321.
19. Ibid., 322.
20. Ibid.
21. See the discussion in Vernon Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1993), 105.
22. Shaykh al-Mufid, *Kitab al-Irshad: The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Imams*, I. K. A. Howard, trans. (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1981), 359-60. Cf. I. K. A. Howard, trans., *The History of al-Tabari, Volume 19: The Caliphate of Yazid b. Mu'awiyah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 152-53.
23. For a discussion of the liturgies held annually in honor of Qasim and Fatima Kubra, see Pinault, *The Shiites . . .*, 131-35.
24. Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar* (Teheran: al-Maktabah al-Islamiyah, 1966), vol. 45, 194-96.
25. Kashifi, 363.
26. Kulayni, vol. 2, 368-69.
27. Majlisi, vol. 46, 11.
28. Kulayni, vol. 2, 369.
29. Yann Richard, *Shi'ite Islam* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 34.
30. Shaykh al-Mufid, op. cit., 379.
31. Fischer, op. cit., 261.
32. Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. xxxi; Michael Fischer, "On Changing the Concept and Position of Persian Women," in Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, eds., *Women in the Muslim World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 213.
33. Majlisi, vol. 45, 114.
34. Ibid., 137.
35. M. H. Bilgrami, *The Victory of Truth: The Life of Zaynab bint Ali* (Karachi: Zahra Publications Pakistan, 1986), 47-53.
36. Majlisi, vol. 45, 117.
37. Mir Babar Ali Anis, *Anis ke salam*, edited by 'Ali Jawad Zaydi (Delhi: Taraqqi Urdu Biyuru, 1981), 272.
38. Tabari, vol. 19, 163.
39. G. E. von Grunebaum, *Muhammadan Festivals* (London: Curzon Press, 1976), 94.
40. Anis, op. cit., 270-71.

41. Ibid., 281.
42. Ibid., 282-83.
43. Ibid., 273.
44. Ibid., 277-78.
45. For a further discussion of *matam* and Hyderabadi Shia guilds, see Pinault, *Shiites*, 83-151.
46. Agha Nasir Mashhadi, ed., *Ibn al-Zahra' wawayla: majmu'a-ye salam wa-nauhajat urdu farsi* (Hyderabad, India: Guruh-e Ja'fari , 1990), vol. 5, 160.
47. Mirza Farid Beg Farid, "Ay Husain jan, ay Husain jan," in *Du'a-ye Fatima: muntakhab-e nauhajat* (Hyderabad, India: Anjuman-e Ma'sumin, 1987), 4-5.
48. Ali Javid Maqsud, "Zahra ki du'a," in *Yeh matam kaise ruk ja'ay* (Hyderabad: Maktab-e Turabia, n.d.), 9. This poem also appears in Mir Ahmed 'Ali, ed., *Karbala-wale: nauhajat-e Anjuman-e Parwaneh-ye Shabbir* (Hyderabad: Maktab-e Turabia, 1989), 10-11.
49. Sayyid Turab 'Ali Rizvi, ed., *Husain-e mazlum: faghan-e 'azadaran* (Hyderabad: Maktab-e Turabia), 117.
50. Mirza Farid Beg Farid, "Islam ko shu'lon se bacha le ga'i Zaynab," in *Du'a-ye Fatima*, 88-89.
51. Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura' in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 52, 58.
52. Shahzadah Hasan Rida, ed., *Bayaz-e matam* (Lahore: Ja'fariyah kutubkhanah, n.d.), vol. 3, 62-63.
53. A. F. Badshah Husain, *The Holy Quran: A Translation with Commentary According to Shia Traditions and Principles* (Lucknow: Madrasatul Waizeen, 1936), vol. 2, 177.
54. Nahid Yeganeh and Nikki Keddie, "Sexuality and Shi'i Social Protest in Iran," in Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie, eds., *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 135.
55. Translated and quoted by Marcia Hermansen, "Fatimeh as a Role Model in the Works of Ali Shari'ati," in Guity Nashat, ed., *Women and Revolution in Iran* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 93.
56. Anne Betteridge, "To Veil or Not to Veil: A Matter of Protest or Policy," in Nashat, ed., *Women and Revolution*, 119.
57. Farah Azari, "Islam's Appeal to Women in Iran: Illusions and Reality," in F. Azari, ed., *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam* (London: Ithaca Press, 1983), 26.
58. Guity Nashat, "Women in the Ideology of the Islamic Republic," in Nashat, ed., *Women and Revolution*, 211.
59. Bilgrami, 13.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Talbot Mundy, *Om: The Secret of Ahbor Valley* (New York: Avon Books, 1967), 25. This novel first appeared in 1924.
2. Rumer Godden, *Bengal Journey: A Story of the Part Played by Women in the Province, 1939-1945* (Calcutta: Longmans, Green & Co., 1945), 103-04.
3. Steven R. Weisman, "Indian Tea Region Yields Bitter Harvest of Unrest," *The New York Times,* October 13, 1986, p. A3; "A Gurkha Group Calls a Halt to Violence in Eastern India," *The New York Times,* June 30, 1987, p. A2; "Gurkhas Attack in India," *The New York Times,* February 14, 1988, p. A6.
4. Sanjoy Hazarika, "India and Gurkha Militants Reach Accord to End Regional Violence," *The New York Times,* July 26, 1988, p. A11; "Gurkhas Reportedly Ending Their Rebellion," *The New York Times,* August 7, 1988, p. A15; Barbara Crossette, "For Gurkhas, Little Time to Stop and Sip the Tea," *The New York Times,* April 3, 1989, p. A4.
5. In 1998, while visiting Muslim and Buddhist shrines in Sri Lanka, I made a side trip to Nuwara Eliya, which is located in the highland region famous for its tea estates. While there I stayed in a hotel called "The Hill Club" and was pleased to discover in its bar another set of Snaffles watercolors. One was entitled "The Finest View in Europe" (apparently intended as a complement to the Darjeeling piece described in this chapter) and showed hounds and red-jacketed horsemen coursing over fields on a foxhunt. Another, called "The Worst View in Europe," depicted a horse tumbling over a hurdle in a race.
6. Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (Alipore: Bengal Government Press, 1947), 57.
7. L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1907), 215.
8. P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 170-73.
9. A. R. Saiyid, "Ideal and Reality in the Observance of Moharram: A Behavioural Interpretation," in Imtiaz Ahmad, ed., *Ritual and Religion Among Muslims in India* (Delhi: Manohar Publishing, 1981), 114.
10. Ibid., 116.
11. Ibid., 116, 140.

CHAPTER SIX

1. M. L. A. Gompertz, *The Road to Lamaland: Impressions of a Journey to Western Thibet* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1926), 1-4.
2. Ibid., 3-5.

3. Maud Diver, *The Great Amulet* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1909), 367-68.
4. Ursula Sagaster, "Observations Made During the Month of Muharram, 1989, in Baltistan," in Charles Ramble and Martin Brauen, eds., *Proceedings of the International Seminar on the Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya* (Zurich: Ethnological Museum of the University of Zurich, 1993), 314-15.
5. Gérard Rovillé, "Contribution à l'étude de l'Islam au Baltistan et au Ladakh," in Lydia Icke-Schwalbe and Gudrun Meier, eds., *Wissenschaftsgeschichte und gegenwaertige Forschungen in Nordwest-Indien* (Dresden: Staatliches Museum fuer Voelkerkunde, 1990), 115.
6. John Crook, "The Struggle for Political Representation in Ladakh," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* (Amman) 1, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 142.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 146-47.
9. Janet Rizvi, *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 66-67.
10. A. H. Francke, *A History of Western Tibet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998), 70. This is a reprint of the original London edition of 1907.
11. Rizvi, op. cit., 150, 162-63.
12. J. Calmard, "'Azadari," in Ehsan Yarshater, *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1989), vol. 3, 174-77.
13. Henri Massé, *Croyances et coutumes persanes* (Paris: Librairie Orientale et Américaine, 1938), vol. 1, 100.
14. Ibid., 131-34.
15. Ibid., 134.
16. Ibid., 130-36.
17. Heinz Halm, *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), 43.
18. For the interaction of prose and poetry in narrative performance settings, see David Pinault, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 102-07, and the references cited therein.
19. Husain Wa'iz al-Kashifi, *Rawdat al-shuhada'* (Teheran: Kitab-forushi islamiyah, 1979), 353.
20. Syed Mohammed Ameed, *The Importance of Weeping and Wailing* (Karachi: Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, 1973), 7-10. See also D. Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 72-73, 102-03.
21. On May 27, 1996 (the eve of Ashura), at the invitation of Leh's Anjuman-e Imamia, I gave a talk on Husain's martyrdom and its implications for Muslim-Christian dialogue. This took place before a Shia congregation in the *matam-*

serai located in Leh's main bazaar. As a thank-you gift the *anjuman* presented me with a painting depicting Zuljenah on the battlefield of Karbala (the work was done by a local artist named Akbar Ali). The horse is shown weeping; blood streams from wounds in its flanks and legs. A popular depiction of the sorrowful Zuljenah is a painting entitled "Asr-i-Ashura" ("Evening of Ashura") by the contemporary Iranian artist Mahmoud Farshchian (b. 1929 in Isfahan). Sakina, Zaynab, and the other "Women of Karbala" are shown embracing the riderless horse in lamentation. The painting is reproduced on the cover of a Shia magazine entitled *Al-Haqq Newsletter* (Ontario) 4, no. 5 (Muharram 1994).

22. Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar* (Teheran: al-Maktabah al-islamiyah, 1965), vol. 45, 264-65.
23. Shahzadeh Hasan Reza, ed., *Bayaz-e matam (bissah savvom): muntakhab wa-taze nauhon ka majmu'ah* (Lahore: Ja'fariyah kutubkhanah, n.d.), 19.
24. "Nauha-ye yawm-e 'Ashura," in Sheikh Ghulam Husain Kerget Chhu, ed., *Muharriq al-qulub marathi wa-nauhajat bi-zaban-e balti* (Kargil, 1972), 173.
25. *Shiaism Explained* (Karachi: Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, 1972), 186-88.
26. Ibid., 187.
27. Ibid., 189-92.
28. Ibid., 195.
29. Ibid.
30. Ghulam Husain Najafi, *Matam aur sahabah: madhhab-e ahl-e sunnat ki kitabon se thubut-e 'azadari* (Lahore: Jami' al-Muntazar, 1976), 194-95.
31. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), figure 39 (after p. 194).
32. Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 45, 171, offers a version of this legend: "When Husain ibn Ali was killed, a crow came and alighted in his blood and covered itself with it. Then it flew off and went to Medina, alighting on the wall of the house of Fatima bint Husain ibn Ali. She was the younger daughter of Husain. She lifted her head and looked at the bird. Then she burst into violent tears."
33. Michael M. J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 335-82.
34. Moore's verses are quoted by a nineteenth-century American traveler, P. V. N. Myers, who made frequent reference to the poem *Lalla Rookh* in his account of Srinagar, "the 'Eastern Venice,'" and in his evocation of Kashmir's Moghul monuments. See *Remains of Lost Empires: Sketches of the Ruins of Palmyra, Nineveh, Babylon, and Persepolis, With Some Notes on India and the Cashmerian Himalayas* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), 366-413.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. E. F. Knight, *Where Three Empires Meet* (London, 1893), 134-35.
2. M. L. A. Gompertz, *The Road to Lamaland: Impressions of a Journey to Western Thibet* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924), 42-43.
3. Adrienne Mong, "Endangered Culture: Ladakh's Buddhists Find Themselves Swamped by Muslim Influx," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 11, 1993, p. 45.
4. David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 16-19, 123-24.
5. Husain Wa'iz al-Kashifi, *Rawdat al-shuhada'* (Teheran: Kitab-forushi islamiyah, 1979), 12.
6. For further discussion of this point see Pinault, op. cit., 115-20.
7. Ghulam Husain Najafi, *Matam aur sahabah: madhhab-e ahl-e sunnat ki kitabon se thubut-e 'azadari* (Lahore: Jami' al-Muntazar, 1976), 30, 44, 48, 83, 98, 107.
8. Kashifi, 353; Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar* (Teheran: al-Maktabah al-islamiyah, 1966), vol. 45, 264.
9. These estimates were given me by officers of the Shia Anjuman-e Imamia during my visit to Leh in May 1995.
10. Janet Rizvi, *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 157.
11. Barbara Crossette, *So Close to Heaven: The Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 98.
12. Martijn van Beek and Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen, "Ladakh: 'Independence' Is Not Enough," *Himal: Himalayan Magazine* (Lalitpur, Nepal) 8, no. 2 (March/April 1995), 10-11.
13. Crossette, op. cit., 91-100.
14. Shridhar Kaul and H. N. Kaul, *Ladakh Through the Ages: Towards a New Identity* (Springfield, VA: Nataraj Books, 1992), 302-08.
15. Rizvi's comment appears in the second edition of her work *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 277.
16. Kaul, op. cit., 154, 358.
17. Ibid., 288.
18. Sonam Wangchuk, "In the Name of Education," *Ladags Melong* (Leh, Ladakh) 1, no. 1(May 1995), 14.
19. Kaul, op. cit., 303-04.
20. This concept of *shabih-e Zuljenah* (the likeness of Zuljenah) with regard to annual Muharram observances is discussed by Najafi, 194-95, where he offers a carefully articulated argument, backed by Qur'anic citations, in support of the veneration of Zuljenah. See also the discussion of this topic in chapter six.

21. Vernon Schubel, in his study of the Pakistani Shia communities of Karachi, describes a blood bank that is set up on Ashura in one of Karachi's Shia neighborhoods: congregants are encouraged to donate blood for hospital transfusions rather than shed their own blood in self-scourging. The experiment's success has proved very limited. See Schubel's work, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 150-51.
22. For a discussion of blood and questions of ritual purity see *Imamiyah diniyat: darajah davvom* (Lucknow: Tanzim al-makatib, 1993), 23. This anonymous pamphlet is part of a series of educational booklets on the Shia faith that is distributed in Ladakh. See also Pinault, op. cit., 107-08.
23. Sayyid Ali Khamenei, *'Ashura: bayyanat-e rehbar-e mu'azzam-e inqilab-e islami wa-istifta'at-e ayyat-e 'uzam piramun 'azadari-ye 'ashura* (Qom: Daftar-e tablighat-e islami-ye hauzeh-ye 'ilmiyah, 1994), 22. For their hospitality and patience in answering questions I thank the staff of the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust in the town of Kargil, Ladakh, especially Sheikh Anwar Husain Sharaf al-Din, who presented me with a copy of this text.
24. Khamenei, op. cit., 21.
25. John A. Grim, "The *Dangki* in Contemporary Taiwan," *Religious Studies News* (published by the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature), vol. 10, no. 4 (November 1995), 19.
26. With regard to the issue of the apparent loss of self-control in Muharram rituals see also Nicola Grist, "Muslims in Western Ladakh," *The Tibet Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3 (Autumn 1995), 68, in which there is a discussion of "energetic breast-beating" during an Ashura procession in Kargil. "As the procession proceeded," observes Grist, "several men became overcome by emotion and had to be restrained by their companions."
27. See Emmanuel Sivan, "Sunni Radicalism in the Middle East and the Iranian Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21 (1989), 1-30; and Werner Ende, "The Flagellations of Muharram and the Shi'ite Ulama," *Der Islam* 55 (1978), 34-35.
28. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 99.
29. Bell, op. cit., 101.
30. For a discussion of occultation in the Shia tradition see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 161-71.
31. For a discussion of Shiism and the values associated with Sufi love poetry see Pinault, op. cit., 47-52, 88.
32. See, for example, a Shia Qur'an commentary by Sayyid Farman Ali entitled *Kalam Allah* (Lucknow: Nizami Press, 1980), copies of which I saw in the

possession of Shia acquaintances both in Kargil and in Leh township. Farman Ali's commentary on Qur'an 37.107 (p. 719) states, "It seems that by the term *dhibh 'azim* [great sacrifice] there is intended no other meaning than the martyrdom of the Imam Husain, peace be upon him. For this very reason the sacred vessel of prophethood [i.e., the Prophet Muhammad] used to say, 'Husain proceeds from me and I proceed from Husain.'"

33. For a discussion of the low esteem in which Ladakhi Shias have been held by both Sunnis and Buddhists, see Pascale Dollfus, "The History of Muslims in Central Ladakh," *The Tibet Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3 (Autumn 1995), 45-46.
34. In 1997 Leh's Anjuman-e Imamia was busy with plans to rebuild and enlarge the *matam-serai* in the main bazaar. This shrine was no longer big enough, I was told, to accommodate the crowds that come during the Muharram season. In a subsequent chapter I discuss the demolishing of this shrine in 1998.
35. John Crook, "The Struggle for Political Representation in Ladakh," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* (Amman) 1, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 145.
36. See, for example, the discussion in Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Arabia, n.d.), 1168.
37. For a discussion of the Panchen Lama controversy, see John F. Burns, "Dalai Lama Finds China's Threats a Subject for Humor and Anxiety," *The New York Times*, March 6, 1996, p. A4.
38. Michael G. Peletz, *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 48.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Muhibbudeen al-Khateeb, *Al-khutoot al-'areedah: Broad Aspects of Shi'ite Religion (Exposition and Refutation)*, trans. Mahmoud Murad (South Burnaby, British Columbia: Majliss of al-Haq Publication Society, 1983), 32. I thank Birch Miles for sending me a copy of this text.
2. Seyyed Muhammad Afdal and Abu al-Hasan Sahib-e Qibleh Naqvi, eds., *Namaz-e shi'a-ye ithna 'ashari* (Lahore: Ja'fariyah kutubkhanah Imambargah Gamay-Shah, 1982), 87-88.
3. 'Abbas Qummi, *Mafatih al-jinan* (Beirut: Dar ihya' al-turath al-'arabi, 1970), 74-78; Mohammad Amir Haider Khan, trans., *Prayers and Invocations* (Lucknow: Madrasat al-Waizeen, n.d.), 30-44.
4. This code of heroic defiance is tempered, however, by the doctrine of *taqiyah* ("dissimulation"): when faced with persecution, Shias are permitted to conceal their religious allegiance. See Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 223-25.

5. Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar* (Teheran: al-Maktabah al-islamiyah, 1965), vol. 44, 225.
6. Ibid., vol. 44, 221.
7. Versions of the "Cup of Suffering" story are gathered by the anthropologist Reinhold Loeffler in his book *Islam in Practice: Religious Beliefs in a Persian Village* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 25, 40-41, 82, 176-77.
8. S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (London: Longman, 1979), 202.
9. Ibid., 204.
10. See, e.g., M. H. Bilgrami, *The Victory of Truth: The Life of Zaynab bint Ali* (Karachi: Zahra, 1986), 16-17, 29-30.
11. Jafri, op. cit., 203-04.
12. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 114-19.
13. Majlisi, op. cit., vol. 44, 230.
14. Husain Wa'iz al-Kashifi, *Rawdat al-shuhada'* (Teheran: Kitab-forushi islamiyah, 1979), 12.
15. Emmanuel Sivan, "Sunni Radicalism in the Middle East and the Iranian Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21 (1989), 1-30; Werner Ende, "The Flagellations of Muharram and the Shi'ite Ulama," *Der Islam* 55 (1978), 19-36.
16. Mohammad Manzoor Nomani, *Khomeini, the Iranian Revolution, and the Shiite Faith* (Lucknow: al-Furqan Book Depot, 1985), 81, 175-86.
17. Badshah Husain, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. iv-v.
18. Ibid., 56, 210.
19. Ahmed H. Sheriff, *The Leader of Martyrs* (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1986), 49-50.
20. Sultana Furqan Khan, *Moharram and Karbala* (London and Bloomfield, NJ: Pyam-E-Aman, 1991), pp. iii, 7. My thanks to Mary Hegland for giving me a copy of this pamphlet.
21. *Imamiyah diniyat: darajah davvom* (Lucknow: Tanzim al-makatib, 1993), 20.
22. Nadeem Hasnain and Abrar Husain, *Shias and Shia Islam in India* (Delhi: Harnam Publications, 1988), 155-56.
23. Pinault, *The Shiites*, 147-51.
24. Janet Rizvi, *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 148, 210-11; Shridhar Kaul and H.N. Kaul, *Ladakh Through the Ages: Towards a New Identity* (Springfield, VA: Nataraj Books, 1992), 22-25.
25. Seyyed Ali Khamenei, *'Ashura: bayyanat-e rehbar-e mu'azzam-e inqilab-e islami wa-istifta'at-e ayyat-e 'uzam piramun 'azadari-ye 'ashura* (Qom: Daftar-e tablighat-e islami-ye hawzeh-ye 'ilmiyah, 1994), 22.

26. Ibid., 21-22.
27. Mirza Farid Beg Farid, "Ay Husain jan, ay Husain jan," in *Du'a-ye Fatima: muntakhab-e nauhajat* (Hyderabad: Anjuman-e Ma'sumin, 1987), 5.
28. Ali Javid Maqsud, "Zahra ki du'a," in *Karbala-wale*, Mir Ahmad Ali, ed. (Hyderabad: Maktab-e Turabia, 1989), 10-11.
29. Mirza Farid Beg Farid, "Uncha rahe apna 'alam," in *Du'a-ye Fatima*, 8.
30. Janab 'Ali Rafi', "Qatl ho gae Qasim ya 'Ali," in *Karbala-wale*, 34-35.

CHAPTER NINE

1. Amar Singh Chohan, *Historical Study of Society and Culture in Dardistan and Ladakh* (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1983), 109-10.
2. On this topic see also Martijn van Beek, "Battle of the Loudspeakers Continues," *Ladakh Studies* (Aarhus, Denmark) 10 (Summer 1998), 6-7.
3. "Migration Worries Ladakh Buddhists," *The Tribune*, May 28, 1999.
4. "Kargil Refugees Regret LBA Statement, Stance," *The Kashmir Times*, May 31, 1999.
5. "Migration," op. cit.
6. Martijn van Beek, personal communication, February 18, 1999. My thanks to Martijn for this information.
7. *The Kashmir Times*, February 9, 1999.
8. Sheikh Muhammad Mahdi al-Mazandarani al-Ha'iri, *Ma'ali al-sibtayn fi ahwal al-Hasan wa-al-Husain* (Najaf: Matba'at al-Nu'man, 1960), vol. 1, 143. The passage appears in a chapter entitled *"Fi fadl al-baka' 'alaybi"* ("On the Virtue of Weeping for Him [i.e, for Husain]").
9. Janet Rizvi, *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 150-51, 211.
10. J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 56-57; Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 258, 363.
11. I asked Martin Soekefeld, a member of the International Association for Ladakh Studies who has done fieldwork in Pakistan's Northern Areas, whether he had heard of *Yawm-e Asad*. He himself was unfamiliar with it; but he put the same question to his colleague Andreas Rieck, who has also worked in this part of Pakistan. Martin reported back to me as follows: "He says that this festival seems to be celebrated in Baltistan too, at least he had heard about it, but he never witnessed it" (Personal communication, November 18, 1999). This was as far as I was able to take the matter when this book went to press. But I intend to investigate the topic further.

12. See, for example, news reports of the 1999 Muharram season in Srinagar: "Muharram Processions Lathi-Charged, Teargassed in Srinagar," *The Kashmir Times*, April 26, 1999, which states, "The processionists' bid to resist the police action was foiled . . . They were chanting religious and pro-freedom slogans besides targeting the government for 'banning the Muharram processions.'" Cf. "Muharram Procession Fired Upon, Teargassed in Srinagar," *The Kashmir Times*, April 28, 1999.
13. "Religious Congregation Observed," *Daily Excelsior* (Jammu), August 7, 1999.
14. Nicola Grist, *Local Politics in the Suru Valley of Northern India* (Ph.D. diss., Goldsmiths College, University of London, 1998), 125.
15. On the topic of Sunni-Shia rapprochement, see Rainer Brunner, *Annaeherung und Distanz: Schia, Azhar, und die islamische Oekumene* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1996), as well as the review of this book by Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999), 280-82. See also Emmanuel Sivan, "Sunni Radicalism in the Middle East and the Iranian Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21 (1989), 1-30.
16. Seyyed 'Ali Khamenei, *'Ashura: bayyanat-e rehbar-e mu'azzam-e inqilab-e islami wa-istifta'at-e ayyat-e 'uzam piramun 'azadari-ye 'ashura* (Qom: Daftar-e tablighat-e islami-ye hawzeh-ye 'ilmiyah, 1994), 22.
17. On the topic of IKMT-Islamiya School clashes in Kargil, see also Martijn van Beek, "Muharram Procession Banned in Kargil," *Ladakh Studies* 10 (Summer 1998), 7.
18. On the persecution of the Hazara Shias and political rivalry between Iran and Pakistan in Afghanistan, see Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: War, Religion, and the New Order in Afghanistan* (London: Zed Books, 1998), 55, 135, 143-44. See also Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 196-206.
19. On the traditional reputation of mullahs among Iranians, see Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 351-52.
20. Grist, op. cit., p. 94, notes the same phenomenon concerning the use of the title *hajji* in Ladakh's Suru Valley.

CHAPTER TEN

1. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984), 246-47.
2. William Montgomery Watt, trans., *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1994). See especially Ghazali's discussion of "The Danger of 'Authoritative Instruction,'" 45-56.

3. Linda S. Walbridge, in her study of Shia immigrants in the United States, *Without Forgetting the Imam: Lebanese Shi'ism in an American Community* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997), discusses anti-Muslim prejudice in America. She compares the experience of immigrant Muslims in this country to that of immigrant Catholics over the last century. Her conclusion (p. 209): "Anti-Catholic sentiment has not disappeared from America, but it is at a low enough level that it certainly does not hinder Catholics from participating in all spheres of activity. There is no reason to think that Muslims in general, and Shi'a in particular, will experience anything much different."
4. Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 202-03.
5. 'Abbas Qummi, *Mafatih al-jinan* (Beirut: Dar ihya' al-turath al-'arabi, 1970), 535-38.
6. Ali Shari'ati, "Thar," in Mehdi Abedi and Gary Legenhausen, eds., *Jihad and Shahadat: Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam* (Houston, TX: The Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986), 260.
7. Ibid., 256-58.
8. See the following articles, all of which were authored by Bill Samii of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Prague, Czech Republic): "Espionage, Religion, and Politics," *RFE/RL Iran Report*, vol. 2, no. 25, June 21, 1999; "Behind the 'Israeli Spies' Case," *RFE/RL Iran Report*, vol. 2, no. 26, June 28, 1999; "Spies Case Being Exploited," *RFE/RL Iran Report*, vol. 2, no. 27, July 7, 1999.
9. Muhammad Husain al-Faqih, *Li-madha ana shi'i* (Beirut: al-Ghadir lil-dirasat wa-al-nashr, 1995), 12-13, 97.
10. Ibid., 99.
11. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 104.
12. *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1965), 6.
13. Msgr. Joseph F. Stedman, ed., *My Sunday Missal* (New York: Confraternity of the Precious Blood, 1961), 192.
14. Ibid., 211.
15. The Catholic Hierarchy of the Netherlands, *A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1984), 281-83.
16. The verses appear in chapter 5, verse 48 of the Qur'an. On this topic see also Ernest Hamilton, "The Olympics of 'Good Works': Exploitation of a Qur'anic Metaphor," *The Muslim World* 81 (1991), 72-81.

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